

October
1994

INTERREGNUM

#7



fantasy roleplaying and more

INTERREGNUM

#7

*An Amateur Press Association
covering fantasy roleplaying games
and anything that interests those who play them.*

Peter Maranci, ed.

Topic: "HORROR"

October 1994

Interregnum is an Amateur Publishing Association, comprised of zines written by individual contributors and mailed to the editor. It is collated and published approximately twelve times per year. New contributors and subscribers are always welcome.

A subscription costs \$1.00 per issue plus the actual cost of the selected method of mailing. Subscribers may open an account from which these costs are deducted by mailing a check or money order in US funds, payable to Peter Maranci, at the following address:

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Since Interregnum is an amateur production, it is necessary for contributors to help cover the costs of production: \$1 per single-sided master page mailed in. Alternatively, contributors may mail 355 good double-sided copies of their zine to the editor. The only additional cost to contributors is the price of the postage to mail their issue to them.

All zines sent in for publication in Interregnum should be copyrighted by the author. Copyright may be asserted by the use of the following phrase:

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or
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Sample issues of Interregnum are available at \$3 each for both US and overseas addresses.

Many trademarked products are discussed in Interregnum. No challenge to the holders of these trademarks is intended.

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PUBLICATION SCHEDULE:

⇒ The deadline for inclusion in Interregnum #8 is November 4th. Zines for Interregnum #9 must arrive by December 2nd.

⇒ The topic for Interregnum #8 is *Haiku*. No, that's not a typo. See the Editorial Pages for details.



—>Pete

It's a truism that all editors complain about the difficulty of their jobs. Personally, I've never been wild about truisms. But boy, is my job difficult! ☺

Some readers may be wondering what happened to Interregnum #6. Here's the story: the issue came together as expected. The initial print run went smoothly; copies were mailed to all subscribers and contributors. About 90 promotional copies were produced for distribution in the greater Boston area.

When the time came to print the promotional copies for distribution elsewhere in the US, in Canada, and the UK disaster struck. Normally I do all the production myself; I copy, collate, hand-staple, box, and mail all 400 or so copies personally. The first weekend I had the help of **Gil Pili**...thanks, Gil! But unfortunately all but one of the smallest copiers were broken that day. Gil and I were only able to produce about 90 copies in five or six hours of work.

The next weekend, the machines were once again broken. I wasn't happy about it, but there was little I could do.

On weekend #3 the machines...yes, you guessed it: broken. I began to suspect that the promotional distribution of IR #6 was not to be. Had one of our contributors unwittingly offended the gods?

I played it smart the next Thursday. In a quiet moment I ran off 300 copies of the front and back covers; cover stock is one of the more mechanically challenging parts of IR production, and since the cover is the first thing people see it's vital that the covers be printed on the best machine available. If the copier choked at that point I could have it repaired the next day. However the covers ran without a hitch. I'd go in on Sunday to run off the contents and put it all together.

But when I got there on Sunday the biggest machine was occupied, unavailable for the day. At that point I realized that with Interregnum #7 due out the next week, there was no way to get the extra copies of #6 done.

And that's the story. Let me make it clear that contributors and subscribers will always receive their copies; that's a small job compared to the promotional run. But 300-odd copies are simply too large a job to be done with ease. I suspect that this sort of thing will probably happen again in the future. In any case the cost of bulk-mailing copies to distributors has been adding up, and will eventually have to be curtailed.

All of which is to say that the supply of promotional copies will be somewhat iffy in the future. Subscribers are assured of their issues, but others are up in the air.

Hint, hint. 8^>}

Topic #8: Haiku

It's not a misprint: the topic for Interregnum #8 is really haiku, Japanese 17-syllable poetry. Really, it's not hard at all once you catch the trick of it. And haiku can be a lot of fun. Here's a non-gaming example I came up with recently:

Mighty Godzilla,
joining battle with Mothra
steps on two small girls...

☺ I'm working on a series of roleplaying haiku for the next issue. You Have Been Warned. ☺

I've already been informed by some contributors that haiku are not something they want to do. No problem; I have two alternative subjects. Eurocentric poets may chose instead to write a limerick (and if anyone chooses to write both a haiku and a limerick they'll receive my undying respect). Alternatively, consider poetry itself as a subject. Roleplaying is, after all, an art form expressed primarily by words, and poetry can apparently be found in pretty much any combination of words imaginable (as many academic poetry journals show 8^> }). How has

poetry surfaced in your roleplaying experience, if at all?

As always, contributors are free to ignore the topics entirely.

I should mention that I'll probably be experimenting with odd and unusual topics more often in the future. For example, one likely topic will be a request for each contributor to create a plot hook for a specific genre. Just another way I hope to jog the APA format a little...

Con Game

A couple of conventions are coming up in January (experience with Interregnum deadlines has taught me that it's never too early to plan ahead). I'd like to get special promotional issues of IR made up for both. One is Arisia, being held at the Boston Park Plaza on Martin Luther King weekend January 13, 14, and 15; I've already made arrangements to attend, and will host an Interregnum party of some kind.

The other convention is RuneQuest Con 2, in California. It pains me more than I can say that RQ-Con 2 is *also* being held on January 13, 14, and 15. What can I do? Since I can't be there myself, I'll have to do the next best thing and send copies of Interregnum. If any IR reader is going to RQ-Con 2 and is willing to distribute issues (put them on a table or whatever) please drop me a line. If possible I'd like to make up a RuneQuest-special issue of IR for the Con. It wouldn't be 100% RQ material of course, but any non-RQ articles would need to be of use to the RQ player/GM. I'll be contacting contributors in the next couple of months about this project.

Freedom of Information?

A contributor has asked me for a copy of the Interregnum paper mailing list. If any contributor or subscriber would object to having their name or address given out, please let me know. I should say here that such information will not be given out to any non-subscriber in any case.

Old Story

As always in the days before we go to press, it seems likely that this will be the shortest issue of Interregnum ever. This time, however, it's probably true. We should manage a respectable fifty pages or so, but that's a considerable reduction on the 90+ pages of IR #6. However, I sympathize with the contributors who couldn't get a zine in for this issue. There are times when a once-a-month schedule is pretty hard to keep up with.

But bimonthly distribution (the only obvious alternative) is simply too infrequent to maintain any sort of continuity. So I'll have to satisfy myself by reminding contributors now that the deadline for Interregnum #8 is November 3rd. With any luck, it just might be our biggest issue ever—maybe? 8^>}

A Party! A Party!

On Saturday, October 29th the first Interregnum Halloween party will be held at my house in Malden. Readers and contributors are invited to drop by in costume, if possible. It, The Shining, and The Thing are all possible video selections; I might even be persuaded to dig through The Great Mound of Unlabeled Tapes and play some bits of SCTV's Count Floyd and Dr. Tongue. ☺

The party will start at 5:00; it'll be one of my infamous barbecues, so please drop me a line at least a couple of days in advance to let me know how much food to have on hand. The fare will be burgers and hot dogs. As a teetotaler I don't know what sort of alcoholic beverages to buy, so the affair will be BYOB (there'll be soft drinks in generous supply, of course).

And if anyone feels like bringing some Call of Cthulhu material along perhaps we can do some scary gaming. ☺

—>Pete

The Interregnum FAQsheet

Interregnum is a monthly Amateur Press Association comprised of individual zines written and formatted by various authors and mailed to the editor for collation, reproduction, and binding. The primary focus is roleplaying games, fantasy, and science fiction, but diversity is valued—authors may write about anything they wish. **Interregnum** is written by mature gamers who necessarily have other subjects of interest beyond roleplaying games. It is hoped that the inclusion of such subjects will produce interesting insights into the roleplaying hobby.

Subscriptions: There is no fixed subscription period. Subscribers should mail a check or money order in US funds payable to Peter Maranci to establish an account; as issues are mailed the cost of the issue and the postage used to mail it will be deducted from the account. When the account gets low the amount left will be noted on the mailing envelope. At that point the subscriber may send more money to continue receiving issues, put their account on hold until some future time, or have the balance returned (at the editor's option, a final issue may be mailed instead to close out accounts in which the balance is less than the cost of one issue).

The usual cost per issue is \$2 plus postage. Due to special circumstances the cost has been lowered to \$1 per issue plus postage. Please note that when and/or if the special deal lapses we will return to the original rate.

Postage: Within the United States 1st class mail for the average issue of **Interregnum** costs \$1.67, while book rate (4th class) costs \$1.05. Subscribers may choose which method of mailing they prefer. Overseas subscribers may choose any method of mailing available from the US Postal Service.

Sample Issues: Sample issues may be obtained by mailing a check or money order for \$3 if the issue is to be mailed within the United States. A sample issue mailed outside the US is \$4 in US funds.

Writing for Interregnum: Anyone is welcome to write for IR. Since **Interregnum** is an amateur publication, not for profit, contributors help defray the cost of photocopying their zines. The cost is normally \$2 per single-sided page. However, the special circumstances noted above have made it possible to reduce the cost to \$1 per page. Contributors are not charged for a copy of the issue they write in—their only additional cost is postage.

Alternatively contributors may mail in 330+ copies of their zine, printed double-sided to reduce mailing costs. Zines mailed via UPS or any other private delivery service should be sent "no signature required".

Format: Zines must be clean and sharp enough to photocopy well. Desktop publishing is not required; zines may be typed, or even handwritten. Margins should be at least 1/2 inch wide on the top, bottom, and outer edges; a one-inch margin should be used for the binding edge (the left side for odd-numbered pages, right side for even-numbered pages). Internal art enhances readability and is always appreciated, as are multiple columns and subheads.

Content: Contributors are free to write as they wish, almost totally free of editorial oversight. I ask only that nothing be included which could lead to legal difficulties; please keep in mind that **Interregnum** is shipped across state lines and overseas, and is distributed in game stores which are open to all ages.

Copyright: All zines should be copyrighted by the author. Copyright may be asserted through the following phrase: Copyright (Your Name) (Date) or © (Your Name) (Date). (c) is not a valid designation.

Copyrighted and trademarked material is often discussed in **Interregnum**. Discussion of such material is not intended as a challenge to any copyright or trademark.

Emailing Zines: Zines in ASCII form may be emailed to the editor via the InterNet for DTP formatting, or sent in on 3.5" or 5.25" DOS-compatible floppy disks. Since time is limited (and becomes tighter as collation looms), ASCII zines sent in for layout should arrive at least four days before the deadline for printed zines. I'll attempt to capture the style of the contributor, if I have a sample of previous work and enough time. I can also accept files created with Publish-It for DOS or Windows or PostScript files on 3.5 or 5.25" disks.

Email/disk contributors may choose to have their zines laser-printed; in that case the cost of the printing will be charged to their account (\$0.50 per page plus the cost of rental time if necessary—not more than a total of \$1 per page). Alternatively zines can be printed on a 24-pin dot matrix printer at no additional charge.

Letters to the Editor will be gladly received, and printed in the editorial section. No letter will be published, however, that is marked "not for publication".

Back Issues: Back issues are available while supplies last. Issues #1-3 cost \$2 each in US funds, plus the cost of postage. Subsequent issues are available at \$1 + postage. Some savings in postage costs may be realized by shipping several issues at once.

Distribution: A limited number of free promotional copies of *Interregnum* are distributed at selected game stores and other sites. If you're interested in distributing free copies of *IR*, please contact the editor.

Please note that as the number of distributors increases (and it has been doing so, steadily) the number of promotional copies available for each site will necessarily decrease. Furthermore, production of promotional copies may be reduced or eliminated without warning. Only paying subscribers can be sure to receive all issues of *IR*. Paying subscribers receive their issues weeks or even months in advance of promotional distribution. Finally, only paying subscribers will receive special mailings of bonus material, should any occur. In other words, the Editor strongly urges readers of the promotional copies to subscribe. ☺

Net Connection: An InterNet alias has been set up which allows correspondents to receive information and updates about the status of *Interregnum*. Anyone who would like to be on that list should send email to maranci@max.tiac.net and include a valid InterNet address.

Glossary:

RPG: Role Playing Game

IR: *Interregnum*. You're soaking in it.

TWH: *The Wild Hunt*, an old and respected APA based in the Greater Boston area. A number of *Interregnum* contributors have written for *TWH*, or still do.

A&E: *Alarums and Excursions*, a slightly older APA based on the West Coast.

RQ: *RuneQuest*™, a roleplaying system played by a number of contributors to *Interregnum*.

AD&D™: *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*™, a roleplaying system

LARP or LRP: Live Action Role Playing (game); a generic term

PBEM: Play By Email

BTW: By The Way

IMHO: In My Humble Opinion

RAEBNC: Read And Enjoyed But No Comment. An acronym commonly used by procrastinating contributors. 8^>}

CD-ROM: Compact Disk, Read Only Memory. Laser disks for computer which hold huge amounts of data. Many high-quality computer games are released on CD-ROM.

:) : a smile, indicating that the text preceding is not to be taken entirely seriously

8^>} : The cynical smile of a bearded, bespectacled editor

LOG THAT

#7

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Art?!

Recently I found myself trying to explain roleplaying to non-gamers. Caught up in my topic, I repeated something that others have have said before me: Roleplaying is Art.

The funny thing is that until that moment I hadn't really considered all the ramifications of that statement. Sure, gaming is a form of art; most roleplayers would agree with that without much thought. But gaming as high Art, as meaningful and worthy of respect as sculpture, painting, or anything else found in a museum? I know *I'd* never thought of it that way.

But it is. Roleplaying is a new form of art with as much potential for human expression as any other art form—and with some unique properties. I suspect that the contributors to Interregnum already know this, at least on some level. After all most of us are adults, in our thirties if not older, and obviously of reasonable intelligence; no mere game or hobby could inspire such long-lasting loyalty (actually I know better, but stay with me ☺).

Of course most roleplaying is not really Art. The vast majority of games are just that, games; the point is not to express or expand consciousness, but to win. Hack 'n' slash games

have become such a stereotype of gaming that the term is almost meaningless, but such games are still prevalent. In such games roleplaying is at most the icing on the cake, and a thin icing at that. Yet from personal experience I can testify that the roleplaying experience has the potential to be much more, though that potential is all-too-rarely realized.

What are the unique qualities of roleplaying as Art? Three—no, four—leap to mind, though if any readers would like to suggest more I'd be very interested. Roleplaying is:

1) Social. It requires a group to exist. Other forms of art have social aspects, but none in which such a degree of freedom is accorded to all participants.



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2) Ongoing. Many of the best roleplaying experiences last for months or years, changing and growing over time. No other art form has this quality.

3) Unrecordable. Though in technical terms a roleplaying session could certainly be filmed and otherwise recorded, no record could reproduce the impact of the game in the primary stage: the minds of the participants. This is probably one reason why RPGs have not caught on with the larger population.

4) Finally, roleplaying is not a spectator event. It's difficult to imagine roleplaying being performed for an audience, but if it was it seems likely to produce boredom and confusion. This, too, is probably a major reason why RPGs are of limited appeal.

New permutations of gaming can circumvent these last two "problems"; live gaming probably has the potential to be a spectator sport (and are "American Gladiators" and pro wrestling that different from some LARPS?). However, it's arguable that LARPS of that sort aren't really roleplaying. Perhaps the key, unique quality of traditional roleplaying is that most of it takes place in the minds of the participants. If so, then it may be inherently impossible for gaming to appeal to the majority of the population—at least, not without a considerable change in general education and sensibilities. Or the development of mind-reading televisions. ☺



The Gaming News

Thanks to **Richard Tucholka** of **Tri Tac Games** for his kind permission to reprint the following Net post. I hope to include a cartoon on the subject (drawn by a Tri Tac employee) in the next issue of Interregnum.

The text is reprinted in unaltered form.

rec.games.frp.advocacy #13716

From: tucholka@aol.com (Tucholka)

[1] FBI RAIDS SMALL MICHIGAN RPG COMPANY

Date: Wed Sep 07 13:07:48 EDT 1994

OK, there have been some wild rumors about the FBI raid on Tri Tac Games just after GENCON. Lets set them straight.

FBI RAIDS SMALL GAME COMPANY
PRESS RELEASE

At 10am Tuesday morning, August 23rd, a special tactical team from the FBI gained swift and overwhelming entry into the corporate offices of Tri Tac Games in Pontiac Michigan to the great surprise of the entire staff who were still sipping coffee.

Richard Tucholka, owner and president of Tri Tac, was duly informed of his rights as the squad of federal agents neatly and politely searched the offices of Tri Tac claiming to be looking for 'phony FBI Identification Badges' and 'Illicit government operation manuals.'

It is to be noted that Tri Tac Games publishes an award-winning Role-Playing Game called Bureau 13, detailing the adventures of a secret division of the FBI which uses magic and Harrier Jump Jets to defend America from supernatural criminals and monsters.

After painstakingly searching everything from the yet-to-be released CD ROM computer game version of Bureau 13, through the paperback copies of the Cult -hit novels from Ace Books in New York, absolutely nothing incriminating or illegal was discovered - an incident close to the precedent setting invasion of Steve Jackson Games a few years ago by the US secret service which resulted in a major lawsuit rightfully won by the innocent game company.

In preparation for another government visit, Mr. Tucholka has informed his lawyer, alerted the media, and set an extra pot of coffee to brew for the agents if they return.

Yes, it happened. No kidding. Apparently some fool at GENCON thought a \$1 double sized Plastic ID badge on flaming orange and pink paper was a threat to national security. These badges were given to players of Bureau 13 as promotional material.

The agents were professional and Tri Tac cooperated with them. Computers were not touched (It is a federal law that a writers 'Works in Progress' may not be taken.) They removed plastic Bureau 13/FBI ID badges from a display shelf and versions of a Department of Justice ID badge produced by Databank Press.

On Thursday the 25th Richard Tucholka was informed that the Federal Prosecutor would not be pressing charges for the badges because there was no malice or intent in their production. There would be a file established at the FBI with these badge examples for future reference. He was instructed to send in all production copies and masters as well as destroy the ID Badge Computer Graphics file in question. Richard Tucholka shook his head and said "Only an idiot could think these badges were real. Wonderful to see my tax dollars at work."

And that's the story.

8)



A Wonder-full World?

There have been some odd developments on my recruitment drive for the Wonder campaign. I posted the flyers shown in Interregnum #6 in two local stores several weeks ago. To my surprise, there's been only one response since then—and that from someone who saw the flyer in Interregnum, not on the wall.

That doesn't make sense. In the past I've put up much cruder game announcements, and had ten or twenty replies. Why should the most polished announcement yet have such a terrible response?

I'd pretty much anticipated the reason, I think, and a caller confirmed it. The flyers are *too* polished; they look like advertisements for a product, not for a campaign. I'll have to post scraps of paper with a poorly-scrawled announcement in faded pencil to get a response. In the meantime, a notice posted in a few groups on the Internet has been considerably more effective.

I plan to print writeups of the Wonder campaign in future issues. However, I'm not sure what form these will take. While I often enjoy campaign writeups, they sometimes seem a little pretentious (at least mine do). Perhaps I'll simply write each adventure up as a scenario after it's played.

Scenario:

~~There's Snow Place Like Home~~

The Ice Ruins

© Peter Maranci October 1994

This generic scenario is designed for use with any fantasy roleplaying system. The impetus for action by the PCs is the Search Object. This can be an object tied in to the rest of the campaign; alternatively, the PCs could be hired to recover a lost or rumored object. Details for the latter are supplied.

If anyone does run this scenario, I'd very much like to hear how it goes. Please drop me a line with comments and suggestions!



I. Hired! (optional)

The adventure begins in a northern city, roughly a month's travel or less from permanent ice fields. The party is contacted by a wealthy merchant who seeks capable salvors. He has a map which shows the location of an ancient religious artifact which is hidden in a castle in the far north, the Sacred Eye of Hec't; this is tremendously valuable to the right people. The merchant will bargain strongly, but

will agree to supply the necessary equipment for the PC expedition plus up to twenty percent of the profit from sale of the artifact. If necessary, he will provide enough up-front money to persuade the party to take the job. Oaths of loyalty may be required.

The map that the merchant supplies is obviously a copy. He admits that he has retained the original for safekeeping, but the copy is exact. He also reveals that a previous party was dispatched on the same errand, but never returned. His son Galen was included in that group; if the party returns with his son the merchant will reward them with a large bonus. Galen is carefully described: a young man of 18 years with long brown hair, a patchy dark beard, blue eyes and an audacious manner. He carries a sword with the family crest marked in sapphires on the hilt.

II. North!

The party travels north. Supply encounters as desired.

III. Chilling Out

The weather becomes bitterly cold. Soon the party enters ice-covered tundra. Exposure, snow-blindness and hypothermia become likely if

the party is careless, and as they travel north the cold and danger increase.

IV. The Snow Cat

On the third day of travel on the ice the party notices a white and graceful form shadowing their movements. It is a large snow cat, about the size of a cougar or large dog. It is clever, almost sapient, but it has no capability for speech. The beast is curious about these strange intruders into its territory, and will not attack unless forced.

The hide of the animal is fairly valuable if properly preserved. On the other hand, with a little effort and a few gifts of food the party may be able to befriend the creature. If so, it will still not approach them closely, but will not hide from their sight.

V. Three Hunters

The second week, a hunting party of three white-fur-clad Ice Barbarians is encountered. They call their tribe the Sevam. These are a peaceable people; they defend themselves if attacked, but even so try to avoid killing. If the snow cat travels with the party, the hunters will greet them with friendship; the beast is considered a totem of good luck by their people.

Otherwise, the contact between the two groups must be determined through diplomacy and negotiation. Once peaceful contact is made, the hunters offer their hospitality to the party. If they accept, they are taken to a tribal ice-house. It is pleasantly warm there, and they are asked many questions about themselves and their travels. They are told that a party of Hotlanders (as they call Southerners) did pass through the area about eight months ago. After buying some smoked meat the party continued north, never returning. The Sevam

themselves do not travel that way, for there is no game there and hunters sometimes do not return.

The elders of the tribe also tell the story of the Great Freeze. According to legend, these lands were once much warmer; the Sevam lived in lands even further in the north then. But in the space of a few months the land became much colder, so much colder that they were forced to move south to their present domains.

The PCs are invited to stay the night, or several nights. They are given an entire longhouse to themselves; though dimly lit, and with a roof so low that they must stoop when they walk, it is warm and filled with odd and interesting curios. The walls are covered with intricately carved tusks of forgotten animals, woven tapestries

depicting scenes from unknown mythologies, hides of beasts never seen in southern lands, a large ivory egg inscribed in an obscure tongue foretelling strange prophecies, and anything else the GM desires. The floor of the house is entirely covered with enormously thick and warm blankets; there are no beds as such.



In the morning the characters are fed, and may trade for goods. None of the Sevam will travel with the party, but they do wish them good luck. The remainder of the trip north is uneventful, the only item of interest being a smoking and steaming hot spring on the third day out. Among the dangers the characters face are avalanches,

snow-covered crevasses, and any arctic beasts the GM cares to supply.

VI. The Castle

The party now enters a region so cold that normal chances of exposure and frostbite are doubled. There are few geographical features here, making navigation difficult. With careful search the party finally discovers the castle.

Little more than ruins remain. The broken base of a tower points upward, covered with snow; this is the sign by which the castle can be located. The ground here is broken and uneven, with many pits and rocks. An incredibly fine and powdery snow covers everything, and the cold is so extreme that the snow behaves like a fine sand, or even a liquid. There are even snow dunes.

VII. Slippery Slope

A search of the area takes an hour resulting in the discovery of a large square hole—apparently the remains of a downward-leading stone stairway. The walls of the staircase are completely obscured by snow. The stair is 20 feet deep, but the bottom 10 feet are filled with powdery snow: from above, it appears that the stair ends ten feet down on a snowy floor. The stairs are also covered with ice, and very slippery; a Dexterity check is necessary to avoid falling. Anyone who slips on the stairs falls deep into the powder, and appear to have been swallowed up by the floor.

A character in the powder is likely to be extremely surprised. It is also possible that they may be injured in the fall, though the snow may cushion them from the full damage. Adding to the confusion is the fact that a frozen body is lying at the bottom of the staircase.

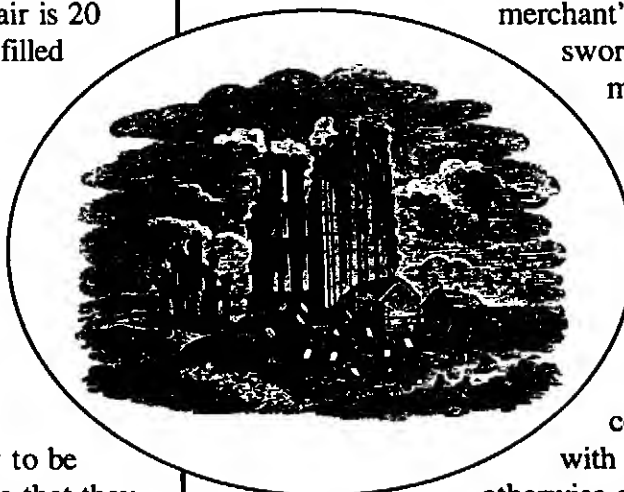
A Dexterity check must be made to begin climbing up the stairs. If climbed on hands and knees, the task will be much easier, though still

difficult. Should the character remain buried in powder for more than a minute or two, they will begin to take damage from the cold.

The characters now face an interesting problem in physics. How will they get to the door? Simply plowing through the snow will be extremely difficult; the characters will have to pick a difficult and iced-up lock or break down a heavy door blind, completely submerged in snow. On the other hand, getting the snow out of the hole will also be difficult. It flows almost like a liquid, making shoveling a time-consuming task indeed. Melting it will result in a large pool of water which will soon become ice, blocking the door closed—and if the characters waded through the water before it freezes, their clothes are likely to become extremely wet. Wet clothes in deep cold can become a life-threatening hazard within moments.

However the PCs resolve the situation, the body in the bottom of the staircase is the merchant's son. It is well preserved by the cold, and matches the description of the merchant's son; it bears a sword with a crest marked in sapphires. The body's left leg is badly broken.

If the party has some means of communicating with the dead or otherwise obtaining the information, they may discover the following: the rest of the party was killed a few miles away when they fell through a thin patch of ice into a deep pit. With the castle in sight, Galen decided to complete the mission; falling through the powder at the bottom of the stairs, he was unfortunate enough to break his leg and freeze to death.





VIII. Icy Surprise

The stairwell ends at a heavy wooden door. It is locked with a heavy and complex lock, difficult to open. Once opened, it reveals a stone corridor ten feet wide, leading straight ahead (north). The corridor goes straight for 30 feet, slopes downward for another 30 feet, and then turns left. Waiting around this corner is a large Silver Blob, about the size of a small horse. It is absolutely silent; the characters are likely to be surprised. The blob registers on magic-detection spells. It lashes out at the party with its six pseudopods, hitting six times per round. Each pod has a 50% chance of hitting, and each does as much damage as shortsword, ignoring metal armor. However, the damage

takes effect the round *after* a successful hit, as the cold penetrates.

Two fighters can fight abreast here, or three at a penalty on all attack skills. The creature takes only minimal damage from ordinary weapons. Weapons under the effect of spells that enhance damage do only that extra damage which is produced by the magic. Magic weapons do full damage. Unenchanted metal weapons striking the creature have a 50% chance of shattering due to the extreme coldness of the blob's flesh.

The blob is completely vulnerable to heat damage, and even a fist attack is warm enough to do full damage (though the fist involved would take damage as if hit by a pseudopod). The creature has no armor and twice as many hit points as a healthy human being. In systems which use hit locations, the creature is treated as if it only has one location. The creature cannot be stunned or rendered unconscious. At temperatures below freezing it regenerates 1 hit point per round until dead (except for heat damage). Mind-affecting spells do not affect the blob, and cold-producing spells will actually heal it. It is normally affected by other magic.

IX. The Room

Proceeding on, the party arrives at a large wooden door with a small shuttered opening at eye level. The door is barred on the outside (where the PCs are). Behind the door is a skeleton waiting to poke the eye out of whoever opens the shutter. A successful perception roll



will alert the players to danger: the faint sound of clacking bones.

This room is the only location of interest in the ruins. All other corridors are filled with snow and rubble, or lead to bare chambers.

The room is full of weirdly glowing skeletons, four for every adventurer. They move silently to the door as it opens. If two characters stand in the doorway, they will face only three skeletons at once. The skeletons are unarmed and unarmored, most attacking with clawed hands; two of the skeletons bear ancient, ornate axes, which they wield with average skill. Strangely, every skeleton "bleeds" a silvery liquid from its bones when broken. Though this liquid looks like that of the blob, it is inanimate. Apart from their glowing bones the skeletons are normal undead.

X. And...

A search of the room will reveal the following objects: 3 moldy tapestries, a brass log-holder by the fireplace, two battered silver lamps of moderate value, a broken wooden chair and a wooden desk in reasonably good condition. Inside the drawers of the desk may be found a writing stone for sharpening pens, several quills in poor condition, some frozen and highly brittle blank parchment, a copper ring engraved with the name "*Mavia*", and documents containing anything the GM feels like throwing in. However the Sacred Eye is nowhere to be found.

However, the desk itself is extremely valuable; it is a product of an ancient artisan of unparalleled ability, renowned for the beauty and simplicity of his designs. The PCs are unlikely to recognize this fact unless they are expert traders or wood-carvers. The desk weighs roughly 400 pounds, and is extremely bulky.

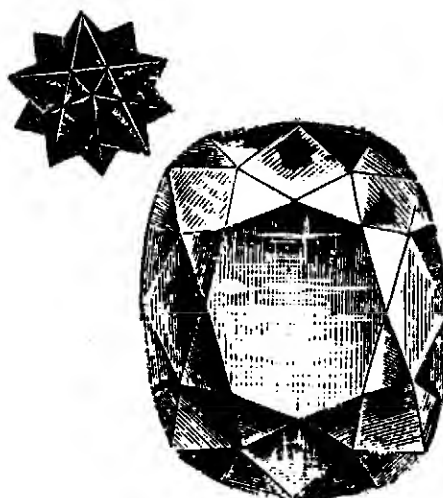
An *intensive* search of the room reveals a hidden door. This door is opened by a secret

mechanism: a nearly invisible catch set in seemingly loose mortar between two nearby stones. Opened, it reveals a small closet-sized space: a priest's hole. Inside is a single inanimate skeleton. Clinging to the decaying bones are the tattered remnants of what was once a fine robe, picked out in cloth-of-gold. A search of the dust on the floor of the room produces a small leather book with pages eaten away by mold, several small pieces of religious-looking jewelry, and an embroidered strap with a flap attached—the last being made of cloth-of-gold, exquisitely decorated with jewels. It is an odd piece, but may be recognized as an eyepatch.

Inside the skull of the skeleton rests the Eye of Hec't. It possesses no magical powers usable by nonbelievers, though it is detectable as magic.

XI. Return

The return should be relatively uneventful. If special effort was made to retain its friendship, the snow cat might choose to stay with the party. The tribe of Sevam will appreciate hearing the story of the party's adventures. The merchant will be most grieved to hear of the death of his son, but will keep his bargain. And the religious jewelry may be sold for a considerable sum.



Topic #6:
THE HORROR...
THE HORROR...

Ironically enough, I couldn't think of anything much to say about horror for this issue. Instead here's a new story which may be mildly horrifying.

In The Box

Copyright Peter Maranci 1994

Where the hell am I?

Nothing. There's nothing. No light, no darkness. Jesus, what's happened to me?

All right, hold on. Shout.

"Hey!"

Nothing. I can't hear anything. Can't feel anything. Am I breathing? I

Hold it hold it HOLD IT. Think. I'm a science fiction guy—there's got to be an explanation.

First things first. I think, therefore I am. Heh. Never thought that lesson would be useful. What's the Latin for that? Res ipset loquitur. No, that's not it. Mrs. Hodes would be pretty disgusted...but then, I never knew as much Latin as she thought. I

Sensory deprivation? Like that movie with the ape-man? But how'd I get here? And

No light, no dark. Doesn't make sense—it's got to be one or the other. Could it be my optic nerve? If my nerve was burned out, would this happen? No...it would have to be brain damage, I think. But I don't feel damaged.

Would I know?

Suspended animation? Not in 1994. Hold it.

I went to sleep. The last thing I did was go to sleep. In my bed. And I never signed up for that cryogenic suspension insurance thing anyway. Besides, I don't believe a frozen brain can think no matter what Larry Niven says.

Maybe I had a heart attack and my folks had me frozen.

No. They'd never get to me in time. My brain would be spoiled meat.

Not spoiled. Not spoiled. I can think. I can think.

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO ME?
WHAT'S—

LIGHT

White room. Misty walls. Like 2001. This had better not be Heaven, or I'm going to feel pretty stupid. Hey, I have a body!

"Yeah!"

Ears work too! All right. I'm okay. All here and in working order! I hope.

"Where the f_ck am I?"

"Welcome." I spin. White suit, white slouch hat—he looks like Patrick McGoochan in The Prisoner. He's seated in a big misty throne, smiling.

Pause. "Okay." Grin on one side. "Okay. What's...what's going on? Where am I?"

He smiles that crooked smile. "You're in my home. And you're welcome."

Um. Better be smart. "Thanks. What's my status? What year is this?"

He chuckles. McGoochan never sounded like ~~that~~. "Nothing to worry about—really. You're fine. If there's anything you want—and I mean anything—ask."

"Is this the future?"

That smile again. "You could say that. Care to see it?"

God, I'm so tired! But I've got to. But it's all too much. "Please. Could you tell me how I got here? Are we in Boston—I mean, Massachusetts? And why am I—"

"Hold it." Soft, but sharp. "There's no rush. Let's have some suitable surroundings."

My bedroom! What a mess. Is he—still there. I guess it's not a dream. But I knew that.

He grins, waves his hand. Sh_t! Everything's flying into place! It's never been this clean before...even that spot on the carpet—

"Bet you've wanted to be able to do that for a long time." He's smiling. Pleased with himself. I sit on the bed, lie down looking at him. Weird thought: I hope I'm not some sort of futuristic catamite. No—can't be. That would be too ridiculous. I scootch back until I'm sitting with my back against the wall. He's looking at me.

"So. Let me think for a minute. I mean...can I..."

One-sided grin as he spreads his hands. I close my eyes. I'd like to pull the blankets over my head...hold on.

Magic is still bullshit. This is the future. Technology. With that sort of special effect it

must be...probably...a computer simulation. Makes sense. Am I a hologram?

"Am I a hologram?"

Grin on both sides that time, and a nod. "Close enough. 'Simulation' would be a better word."

Um. Simulation. Um. Ohhhh... "So I'm dead."

One side, but he looks a little sympathetic. "Not really. You're you. Peter Maranci. Is there any point in thinking about it any other way?"

Hmm. I guess not. God.

"Am I a second-class citizen? Or any sort of citizen? Do I have any rights?"

A temporizing look. "Well, no. But I do treat my guests humanely. You'll be well treated. And, well, there's no double whammy here—no tomato surprise. This isn't the Twilight Zone, and you won't find that you're actually in Hell. You should be happy. I want you to be comfortable—you have nothing to worry about. Really." A searching, sincere look. "You're tired. Get some rest; we'll talk in the morning. I'll answer all your questions in the morning."

I *am* tired. And he's gone! Wait, a tired hologram? Programming. Dammit, I'm a puppet.

But I'm real. And so tired...

Wish he'd left a hologram woman for me...what kind of future is this...heh. Nah.

WHOA. What a dream. The alarm's not on! Is it a workday? Am I late?

Him again. (No!). Now he looks like Gandalf, but I can tell—it's him. "There's no more work for you. You won't have to go back to the firm again."

"Okay. I guess there had to be an upside to this."

"More than that, you'll see. So. Questions?"

"What year is it?"

"2064. A.D., of course. Anno Domini."

"And I'm in a computer. Can I see what it's like outside? Do we have FTLflight?"

"Faster than light? No. It may turn up some day, but no one's very interested any more. After all, our world is effectively infinite in size."

"So most people live like this? Hooked into computers?"

"Those who can afford it. Though most who do are careful to take care of themselves. Fitness is more...more a part of society than it was, even in your day. We're not pod people."

"So what's happened? Are there space colonies? New inventions? New advances in physics—what's the successor to Chaos Theory? Who's in the White House—is there still a White House?"

He laughs...he's enjoying this. "Okay, sit back. I'll give you a show. With pictures."

He does. It's a hell of a show. Things didn't turn out as badly as I feared, it seems. Though not as well as I could have hoped. Different, mostly. Funny, because that doesn't surprise me at all. Always expect the unexpected—I figured *that* one out a long time ago.

The show goes on. Day after day...every morning I wake up, and he's there. Not pushing, but there. If I ask him to leave me

alone for a while, catch my breath, will he turn me off?

He really seems to like all this. I'd better be careful...I know how easy it is to erase a program. Can I escape? Is he telling me the truth?

The things he can do in this room—no, this *holospace*, are incredible. Any sensation, any setting...I can't imagine how many programming-hours went into this. It's all so *real*.

He's gone again, and I'm tired. The room is different now, bigger, more comfortable. Silly not to take advantage of my condition, I guess. Just a few bytes changed and I'm in a space suite instead of Malden. Pretty amazing. And he seemed to enjoy doing it. He sure gets a kick out of this place...

Jeeze. All these changes. And...am I real? Oh, God, am I real?

I'm me. I remember. I remember spending the day home sick in my bathrobe when I was fourteen after I watched Mommie Dearest, screeching like Faye Dunaway and cleaning just for the fun of having something to scream about. "But is it *clean* Christina? Do *you* think it's clean?" Heh.

I remember. The fall in the library when I was four. My baby blanket. That pink wax rabbit. That atomic mole nightmare when I was four. Yeah, I'm me. And if they programmed me to think that I know myself...they've done a damn good job. Screw it.

Next day. He looks like Orson Welles in *The Third Man*. I'm getting reckless, but I don't care. "Are *you* a hologram?"

He's amused. "No. It would be safe enough to say that I'm real. No offense intended, of course."

"And your appearance...just a sort of "suit", as it were?"

"Exactly. I'm not surprised that you're catching on so quickly, given your background in science fiction."

I nod. "You've told me a lot. Thank you." He nods and smiles.

"Just one more thing. Why am I here?"

Is that a smirk or a grimace? With Orson, is there a difference? I can't tell.

"It's...a hobby, if you will. A popular one for intelligent people. Talking to artificial personalities. You can bring back Beethoven from the dead, for example, and restore his hearing, play modern music for him, show him modern entertainment equipment. His reactions are wonderful."

I have to take this in. "You know, I think I can see the appeal. I remember I sometimes wondered what Beethoven would think of *They Might Be Giants*."

He nods. "Or of *Oingo Boingo*. You get the idea. Of course some programs are more popular than others. There's Elvis, for example. Or Marilyn Monroe—one of the hottest programs around. Something like six years on the New York Times best-seller list."

Ho ho. "I don't suppose she just answers questions."

He has the grace to look a little embarrassed. "No, of course not. She's usually pretty grateful to find out that she's not dead."

"Do you have many holopeople?"

"We call them Sims. Hmm. Yes, I have decent collection. A bit esoteric, some rare items...there probably aren't more than two

hundred people in the world who have Paul Linebarger, for example."

Wow. Cordwainer Smith? Too much. "How do you...get them?"

"There are stores. People trade. Some are gifts. Oh, you mean how're they *made*? Some are programmed, designed—talking autobiographies, so to speak. Though the better ones have grafted emotional tracks."

"Am I going to meet these...Sims?"

"Maybe later—some of them, anyway."

Something in his voice... "Some of them are erased, aren't they."

"Yes. But you won't be."

'Night'. Strange that I should have insomnia when I don't even have a body. Strange that it should seem dark when I'm really nothing more than electrical impulses—light, really—in a machine. It's all so insane. And...say, why *me*? Elvis and Marilyn I can understand, but why *me*? I'm not famous, and I didn't die—at least, I don't remember dying.

Next day. He looks strange, smooth but somehow old—the first body I don't recognize.

I don't want to ask him. We talk and talk. But finally there's nothing else to say.

"Who programmed me? What sort of biography did they use to make me up?"

He's giving me a strange look. "Sorry, I didn't tell you. Not all Sims are composites. If the original is available, they can make a personality

print. It's more complicated than that, but that's the gist of it. You're a print."

Huh. What the hell was I thinking? "Look, why me? What did I do? I mean, why do you have *me*?"

"Why you?" He smiles strangely. "You tell me."

He's gone.

He's crazy. How the hell should I know why? Maybe I became famous. But how? There were no prospects in the near future. It doesn't make any sense—

Oh. Oh no—yes. It makes sense. The bodies he wears. The way he seems to know every obscure fact I mention. Even the way he speaks. All of it so familiar. All of it *just like me*.

My God. I'm the ultimate in personalized accessories. Yourself in a box?

How could he do this to me?

How did I get to be such a bastard?

I want out.

-end-



Comments #6

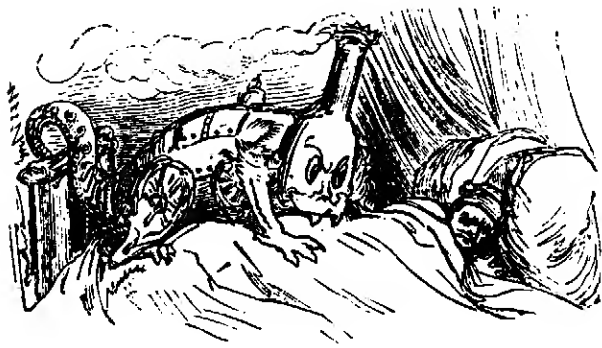
Doug Jorenby: Regarding the possibility of creating a truly alien perspective, I suspect that the question won't be resolved until we encounter a truly alien race. On the other hand, we have races right here that may help explore the issue. Take cats, for example. As a cat person, I'm firmly convinced that cats have a wide emotional spectrum, and that there's no emotion that a cat may feel that I couldn't understand. Does that mean that cats and human beings share a fundamental similarity, or am I just deluding myself that these small carnivores are like me? ☺

Castle Falkenstein sounds extremely interesting. With your strong recommendation in mind, I picked up the book in the local game store. It's been a while since I last bought a new game system; I was shocked to see that the price was over \$30! I found that I simply could not pull out \$30 from my wallet for a game. Especially one that I was unlikely to play, not because the game isn't good but because I'm not playing any new games. Weird, huh?

Re the question of which form of LARP fosters better world development, Interactive Literature or Live Combat: It depends on the game, I guess. The Interactive Lit. games I've seen have all been one-weekend deals, with a differing background for each new game; this makes it difficult to develop a continuing world. On the other hand, the "worlds" of Live Combat games are generally rather crude and simplistic. Tabletop roleplaying blows the doors off of both kinds of LARP in any case.

George Phillis: I believe that a superhero LARP could indeed be done, but it would work best in an Interactive Literature format. In any case, need a superhero game feature flying and other showy effects? A game with a more sedate power level might work very well, if handled right. The challenge would be to find a team of GMs up to the task.

The new novel looks great—I look forward to the next installment. For some reason I really enjoy fantasy genre works more than superhero stories; I'm not sure why. In any case, the beginning of No Tears for a Princess/The Warrior Unseen (is that the whole title, are are they two alternatives?) is deft and involving. I have to wonder what your secret is for handling dialog.



Gil Pili: I appreciate your concern over the possibility of a flamewar in **IR**; thus far we've managed to avoid that problem, and with any luck we'll continue to do so. Frankly, I don't think they make interesting reading. And we're all a little old to be squabbling in public (not that we have anything to be squabbling about).

Am I to conclude that you've actually stuck your finger in an electric socket? How shocking. Sorry. I apologize. Couldn't help myself. ☺

I too am looking forward to the **Stargate** movie, and even more toward **Heinlein's The Puppet Masters**. Of course, they'll probably stink; it seems that the only good science fiction movies I ever see are those that I expect to be bad. On the other hand, it's nice to see that science fiction in the movies is clearly here to stay. Given the "name" stars in both features, we're clearly out of the B-movie ghetto for good.

"Clouds, Like Sentinels" was *very* interesting, Gil—very different. The conclusion was perhaps a bit depressing, but it worked. Though it might have been a trifle abrupt...I'll have to re-read this one a few more times and think about it. Definitely food for thought, which is good.

Curtis Taylor: First, my sympathies on the car accident, and congratulations that you yourself were unharmed. I've been in a number of accidents myself (though they were never my fault; the first time I was hit by a speeding car as I walked my bicycle across a road at the age of 12), and I know well how much they can take out of you. It's inevitable that we're all going to be involved in auto accidents; anything you can walk away from has to be considered okay. Frightening, but better your car than your life, right?

That reminds me of a horror story of my own: in fact, two of the accidents I was in where notably bizarre to say the least. Remind me to email you about 'em sometime.

The RQCon 2 information looked extremely enticing; it's a pity that I won't be able to make it, but it conflicts with Arisia, the one convention I've always gone to. Would you be interested in representing **IR** at RQCon 2?

Perhaps I should consider myself fortunate that I can't say anything meaningful about the card info. **Magic: The Gathering** is a cruel monkey to have on one's back...☺

Dale Meier: The Toon items were definitely amusing, Dale—they fit in well with the spirit of the best old cartoons. Speaking of which, I've noticed with shock that old Bugs Bunny cartoons are actually being *censored* in reruns! For example, there's one classic in which Daffy and Bugs are in a contest to entertain an audience. Daffy is technically better, but bombs every time while Bugs gets a huge response with no effort. Finally, Daffy performs a killer act: he swallows nitroglycerine, gunpowder, Uranium

238, shakes well, swallows a lighted match and...BOOM!

In a rerun on Nickelodeon a few days ago the "swallow a lighted match" line was obviously cut. I suppose that the network executives (read: morons) thought that some kid might swallow a lighted match in imitation (as if swallowing gunpowder and TNT are okay! ☺). If this keeps up, we'll soon be watching nothing but **Barney**. This sort of thing must be stopped.

The reviews were excellent. Just the sort of substantive material that Interregnum needs. I was interested to see that Judge Dredd is still being published, since I read the original stuff many years ago.

As for what LARP system I'd recommend: in part that depends on what LARP organizations are in your area. I suspect that there may not be any? If so, your choices are limited. The IFGS rules are workable for combat and such. Interactive Literature rules can be easier to roleplay with. However, there are no IL rulebooks that I know of on the market. Perhaps the Nexus rules recently published by Chaosium would serve your needs, though I agree with a recent assessment of the authors in a past issue: one's a nice guy, the other is a real jerk. For some reason, I have a problem purchasing the artistic work of jerks, no matter how good that work might be...

Virgil Greene: In your review of humorous games you neglected to mention TWERPS, The World's Easiest Role Playing Game System; that seems odd, since you've been such a fan of that system for so long.

The comedy bits were very good. You may be interested to hear that a reader of the promotional issues singled them out for praise.

Interesting review of The World Builder. It seems that new roleplaying magazines come

into existence so frequently (and disappear just as quickly) that you may never run out of new publications to review. I've mailed a set of IRs to the editor of the Zine-Find for review, and will report on the result when it turns up.



Collie Collier: "You're Playing What?!"

is an excellent article, scholarly (but very readable) and thorough. Nice work. However, there does seem to be a section missing; is that my fault? I have a nagging fear whenever I format a zine that the text will somehow be damaged.

A random thought: Is it necessary that the player characters in a campaign be a team? Could a game function *without* a team?

I couldn't help but start to apply your archetypal team roles to other dramatic situations. How would you classify Iago, for example?

David Dunham: A "well-spoken" Storm Bull worshipper!? He's obviously a Trickster in disguise! ☺

I enjoy your RuneQuest material very much—it's wonderfully dense. I can't recall if you

published the mechanics of Pendragon Pass in The Wild Hunt, but if not perhaps you could publish them here—if Chaosium doesn't mind.

I admired the use of the marriage ceremony in the campaign. That's a major (and terrifying) experience for anyone which is simply ignored by 99% of GMs. I remember a game in which my own character got married; it was a seminal point in his life, a major milestone. And a completely non-violent one.

David Hoberman: AD&D™ is “light” fantasy, David? *That's* a bit hard to believe! The game is almost always an focused on killing and death. “Light” fantasy to me would be, say, The Wind In the Willows. I suppose some fuzzy animal games might fit that pattern, but those I've heard of have followed the same pattern of violence as more traditional games, and even “dark” games—which seem to be distinguished from mainstream games more by attitude than by content.

Wonder may be a light fantasy game—or at least, lighter than most. There will be some combat, but probably very little. Can interest in a game be sustained without recourse to the quick fix of conflict? Well, yes. My Nereyon campaign has very little violence, though in many ways it's darker and more tragic (or bathetic) than games such as Vampire.

A very amusing campaign writeup. Will there be more, or was that a one-shot?

Elizabeth McCoy: Welcome to IR, Elizabeth! Glad to have you aboard, even if only for an occasional visit.

It's interesting that you should choose amnesia as a topic. I've written extensively about that topic in The Wild Hunt, and even practiced it on David with mixed results. I'm almost surprised he allowed you to try it after his experience with me...☺

Needless to say, I agree with you absolutely. A character with amnesia is a very good way to get a key role with lots of roleplaying potential in a game. And the better your GM, the more interesting and challenging your character will be.

BE MY GUEST II

Directly following this page is the course syllabus for “Designing a Fantasy Role-Playing World” by Rich Staats. Some readers may remember his scenario “The Fastest Tentacle In the West” in IR #3. I was forced to format the article rather hastily; any errors are probably mine, not Rich's fault.

NEXT ISN

On time and larger, I hope.

—>Pete



COLOPHON

The Log That Flies #7 was gestated in a P. Maranci 30.5 brain. Much of the text was then written with PC-Write 2.5, an ancient but serviceable villain word processor.

The text was formatted for desktop publication using Publish-It 4.0 for Windows, a cranky but cheap DTP program.

The DTPed document was printed at a ruinous cost at a laser printing service, on a 300 dpi laser printer.

Most of the art in TLTF is taken from books of copyright-free clipart published by the Dover Publishing Co. of Mineola, NY. Reviews of various Dover books may be printed in future issues.

The art was copied on a Kodak 2110 high-speed duplicator.

Is it just a coincidence that Quark the Ferengi on Deep Space 9 looks exactly like Ross Perot? ☺ —>Pete

Greetings!

This is the selection on "Designing a Role-Playing World" I promised. Before launching directly into it, I have a couple comments. First, I present two approaches to designing a role-playing world. I am not claiming that these are the only ways to create a world or even the best ways, but the two methods presented here have stood me in good stead for over fourteen years of DM/GM/referee'ing.

*The material is copyrighted 1994 by the author (Rich Staats) unless otherwise noted. You are free to copy and distribute it for *non-profit* functions. All that I ask is that you mention the source of the material before quoting it.*

On that same note, pay close attention to the sources quoted in this document. Remember "copying from one source is plagiarism while copying from many sources is called research!"

I gave this as a seminar, and the document is in an expanded-outline format. If you have any questions or comments on the document, I will be glad to answer them. Please direct them to my e-mail address though as I do not have much time to read the net these days. The use of the words he, him and his in this document are gender neutral references.

On a closing note, if any groups are interested in seeing the presentation, I would be glad to schedule a time and place (as long as it is within reasonable time/financial constraints for the author).

Enjoy!

Rich Staats

Designing a Fantasy Role-playing World

I) Overview: The document is divided into four major sections. We will begin with a purpose statement and move onto look at definitions which will be germane in the remainder of the document. Next we will look at the organization of the document, and then we will describe two procedures for creation of a fantasy role-playing world.

The name of the game in role-playing for the referee is creating a world where the players can suspend disbelief. The techniques described in this document will aid you in achieving this objective.

II) Purpose: to teach two methods for the development of fantasy role-playing worlds.

III) Definitions:

* Role-playing:

—Gygax in Role-Playing Mastery: "Acting out a make-believe position."

—Costikyan in Toon: "Role-playing is just 'Let's Pretend' "

—Schick in Heroic Worlds: "Quantified Interactive Storytelling"

We will use Schick's definition for the purposes of this document.

* Character: The role a player assumes when playing a role-playing game.

* Adventure: A role-playing session or series of sessions using the same characters throughout with definite beginning, middle and ending.

* Campaign: A series of connected sessions where the characters accomplish something which could not have been done in one adventure.

* Fantasy Role-playing: (FRP) Role-playing which takes place in a fantasy milieu.

- * Fantasy Role-playing World: The environment in which the characters interact. It has a consistent set of physical laws and a coherent mythical order.
- * Cross-Over: Travel from one role-playing milieu to another.
- * Multi-verse: Set of all role-playing worlds/milieu's possible for characters to enter from a particular campaign. (Note: these worlds do not have to all be run by the same referee.)
- * Party: A group of characters involved in a campaign who travel through the role-playing world together with a common set of goals and objectives.
- * PC: Player Character, a character controlled by a player
- * NPC: Non-Player Character, a character controlled by the referee
- * Tie-In: Connecting two plot threads or regions that were not previously related.
- * Maguffin: a plot device or thread specifically designed to incite player interest

IV) Organization of the remainder of the document:

- A) References and Supplies helpful for World Creation
- B) Bottom-Up World Creation
- C) Top-Down World Creation
- D) Organizing the FRP World
- E) Conclusion

V) References and Supplies:

A) References (This is a list of useful resources for world creation, but the list is not designed to be exhaustive. Many of these sources were referenced in preparing this document.):

- Role-Playing Mastery by Gary Gygax
- Master of the Game by Gary Gygax
- Heroic Worlds by Lawrence Schick
- Campaign Law by ICE
- Best of White Dwarf Articles (Vols. I & II) by GW
- World Builder's Handbook by DGP
- Fantasy Wargaming by Bruce Galloway
- Different Worlds (Most volumes 1 to 20)
- Beast Enterprises' publications TS, etc.
- The Art of War in the Middle Ages by C.W.C. Oman
- War from the Stone Age to Alexander the Great by Arthur Ferrill
- Powers and Perils by AH
- Landscape: Physical Geography by Marsh and Dozier
- Contending Theories of International Relations by Doug Herty and Pfaltzgraff
- The Oxford History of Medieval Europe by George Holmes

Traveller and Megatraveller by GDW

"Glorantha", "Land of Ninja" and "Vikings" by Chaosium/AH

"Quest World" by Chaosium

Many GURPS supplements by SJG

A good Atlas

A good Dictionary

B) Supplies:

Notebook — a nice, well bound notebook which you can carry around with you and jot down ideas as they occur to you.

Three-Ring Binder — a place to organize your sketches, maps, and articles you copy and save

Paper Punch — to prepare items for inclusion in your three ring binder

Camera — to take pictures of items that catch your eye with respect to world building/design

Colored Pencils — to highlight items and help you map and sketch

Felt-tipped Markers — as per colored pencils

Good pencil and eraser — for making/erasing notes and design work

Good ruler — useful for drawing lines or measuring things

Hex and graph paper — organizational tools/big aids in sketch maps or line diagrams

C) Two well known, mail order gaming suppliers (there are many, but here are two I have had good luck with over the years):

Zocchi/GameScience Distributors 1512 - 30th Avenue Gulfport, MS 39501

Wargames West P O Box 9496 Albuquerque, NM 87119

VI) Bottom-Up or Campaign World Creation

A) Overview

- (1) The most common method in practice of creating an FRP world
- (2) Natural outgrowth of campaigns
- (3) "Easiest" method
- (4) Potentially inconsistent
- (5) The "Pre-Fab" campaign (e.g. Ravenloft[tm], Dark Sun[tm], EarthDawn[tm], etc.) is a sub-set of this

B) Description: this method develops the world on a "need to know" basis for the characters. typically the referee does not develop the details for the world until the characters have gotten to the point in the campaign where the information is relevant.

One can view this as the "concentric circle" method of world creation. The circles represent the parts of the world which must be developed to accommodate the characters demands on the world. The longer and deeper the campaign goes, the more there is a requirement for information. The characters have a certain "sphere of influence". The parts of the world touched by that sphere must be developed.

C) Advantages of the Bottom-up Method:

(1) The development of the campaign is natural. The FRP World grows and matures as the campaign grows and matures. The referee is able to directly see which areas of the world need more development based on the actions of the characters.

(2) The players are an intimate part of the world creation process. The actions of the PCs affect the part of the world “seen” by the characters; so, the players help define the world by determining what needs more detail and what does not. For example, if the players are very concerned about clothing styles in the world, the referee is likely to spend more time in that area, but the referee might be able to get by with a minimal description or examination of artistic styles.

(3) The referee does not devote “wasted” time in world development. Because the world is shaped based on the characters’ sphere of influence, the referee knows that most of the details he creates will be useful to the players.

D) Disadvantages:

(1) The referee has less control in the world design than in Top-Down world creation.

(2) There is a large potential for inconsistency in the world creation. This is especially true when the referee is mixing and matching “modules” into his campaign. Since many of the details in the world are being created more or less ad hoc, some of the details may be inconsistent with each other.

(3) The referee takes a big risk of being caught “off-guard” if the players ask questions about details the referee did not anticipate or if the characters travel to some area of the world which has not been examined in advance by the referee.

(4) The relations between portions of the world can be artificial. For example, if the referee decides to use both portions of Krynn[tm] and Arkham[tm] in his campaign, the connections between the two areas may be contrived at best.

E) How to Design a Bottom-Up World:

(1) Define the “Key Areas” which will be affected by the Campaign

(i) Identify the geographical regions where the party will be operating in.

(ii) Identify the key groups (e.g. national, social, religious, racial, species) which will influence the Campaign.

(2) Develop the relations between these key areas.

(i) Go one level of detail past what you believe the campaign will need.

(ii) Be as “open ended” as possible with motivations for individuals. “Those wacky players do the most unexpected things!”

(iii) Be as consistent with tie-ins as possible. Try to derive some motivation for connecting plot lines and regions. Answer the question, “why are these things related?” before you spring it on the player characters.

(iv) Define the motivations behind various groups important to the campaign (e.g. racial, theological, economic, etc.)

(3) Place maguffins in the campaign to draw the characters into the background of the region. In this way, you can direct the campaign development to some extent.

(4) Be willing to ad lib, but **WRITE DOWN YOUR AD LIBS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER THE SESSION**. Ok, so you decided the Grey Wizards ear was green! Fine, but the next time the characters run into the Grey Wizard again, they will expect his ear to be green. If it is not, you better have a good explanation ready to go.

(5) Keep a good campaign diary. Use the notes to redefine the key areas based on the players actions in the session, and then start over again with step (1) above.

F) Helpful Hints in Designing a Bottom-Up World:

(1) As you organize for an adventure, be willing to discard material that does not fit what already exists in your campaign world. **NEVER SAY "I DID IT, BECAUSE IT WAS IN THE MODULE."**

(2) Likewise, be willing to add material to tie together the current adventure with adventures that came before or that you are planning to run in the future. For example, if there is a religious faction that is the lynch-pin to a module you would like to run in your campaign in the future then you will want to drop hints that such an organization exists in earlier sessions. That way, it does not seem so incongruous when you introduce the sect later and does not beg the question "hey, if these guys are so influential how come we never heard of them before?"

(3) Write down plenty of notes and lots of maps. Make several potential plotlines up. Let these sit for a couple of days. Re-evaluate them. Ask yourself the following questions:

(i) Are they reasonable?

(ii) Will the party find them plausible? (Not the same as (i) above.)

(iii) Are they consistent with the campaign to this point?

(iv) Are they complete enough to cover the major expected courses of action the campaign is expected to take?

(v) Are there sufficient "safety nets" to draw the party back to the central campaign themes if the group strays in unexpected ways? Parties always do unexpected things. If you have a particular theme you want preserved in the campaign, or if there are things which must occur from a plot continuity standpoint then you should have back up plans of how to get the party involved if they do something quite the opposite of what you expect.

(4) Be willing to accept suggestions from the party to help you develop the world. In practice, it is useful to spend five minutes after each session asking the players about what they want to see more of and anything they have questions about from the session. I have also found it is very useful to give the players some handouts each session like maps, old documents, diagrams, etc. It helps them picture the campaign world more easily.

(5) Try to create interesting characters and plotlines. Be careful never to fall in love with a particular NPC or place in the campaign, because the PC's are sure to find some way to destroy that NPC or place through pure chance without malice or forethought!

(6) The purpose of gaming is to have fun; if creating the world is so time consuming and difficult that it is no longer fun then you should do something else (e.g. let someone else referee for awhile, etc.)

VII) Top-Down or Deliberate World Creation

A) Overview:

(1) It's time consuming!

(2) It is difficult!

(3) It is incredibly rewarding!

(4) It creates a very consistent world.

(5) **THIS IS GENERALLY NOT FOR A FIRST TIME REFEREE!!!**

B) Description: This method develops the world beginning with the fundamental cosmology and works down to the size and description of the sandgrains the hobbit, peasant girl has between her toes.

One can view this as the Calculus textbook approach to FRP world creation. Every portion that is added is logically self consistent and at the same time flows from earlier portions developed.

C) Advantages:

- (1) The referee has *total* control over the development of the world.
- (2) The world is logically consistent. (At least the world is as logically consistent as the referee can imagine.)
- (3) The referee runs little risk of being caught off-guard with respect to details or background in the campaign.
- (4) It is one of the most direct creative processes possible. When you are finished, your world will be a direct reflection of your creative energies.

D) Disadvantages:

- (1) The players have less input in the creation of the world.
- (2) The process is very time consuming.
- (3) If the campaign is not a long one, the referee runs the risk of spending large amounts of time on detail which the players will never directly experience.

E) How to develop a Top-Down World

(1) Select a gaming system that conforms to your fantasy world view. If you are fortunate, you can use an existing system "off the shelf", but it may involve large modifications to existing systems or even development of an entirely new system. Here are a few things to consider:

(i) Is the system consistent with your own moral and political "comfort zone"? If it is not then choose another system. There is no shame in this. You are the referee after all. It would be the height of arrogance for a gaming group to ask you to contribute hundreds of hours in time and energy to a system you feel uncomfortable with.

(ii) Does the system have the right "feel" for your concept of the fantasy world?

(iii) Are the mechanics workable? Some systems have great atmosphere, but the mechanics are too great a burden when you actually try to play.

(2) Determine the scope that your world must cover. Do you need to design a "world" that encompasses an entire solar system or will something the size of metropolitan Boston do? A few helpful questions to help you determine the scope of your world would be:

(i) Does your referee style support the grand quest motif? (Larger)

(ii) Do you like LOTS of local detail? (Smaller)

(iii) Could you do a whole campaign in a single village? (Smaller)

(iv) Do you like to see lots of exploration? (Larger)

(v) Does the rules system you are using have provisions for long travel? For example, teleportation, tall ships and wagon trains all imply long journeys. (Larger)

(vi) What is the technology level in the campaign? (Higher=Larger)

(3) Develop the cosmology. Answer all of the following questions. (Note: the players may never know these things, but you should.)

(i) Where did the world come from?

(ii) What happened to the deities (if any)?

- (iii) Are they still active in the world?
- (iv) Are other planes or worlds accessible?
- (v) Is magic possible? Psionics? How accessible are these things?

(4) Develop the physical world.

- (i) Develop the geography. What fraction of the world is water versus dry land? How many suns, stars, planets and moons are there? Where are the mountain ranges? Are there any areas of geological instability? Why?
- (ii) Develop the climate. Are there tides in the ocean? Are the tides related to the cosmology? Which areas are frigid? Arid? Wet?
- (iii) Highlight any peculiar (different than Earth) features.
- (iv) Are there any special (e.g. magical) areas ?

(5) Determine how you would like to populate the world in gross terms. What races would you like to include? What general types of societies would you like to have? Are these compatible with the results you obtained in steps 3 and 4 above?

If not, can you modify the results to accommodate the cultures and races? (Possibly by including some special areas?) Otherwise, go back to step three and re-work the world until the results are consistent through step 5.

(6) Develop an eco-structure.

- (i) Determine the food chain.
- (ii) Where are the fertile areas? Waste areas?
- (iii) Place the vegetation or lifeforms at the base of the food chain.
- (iv) Are there areas with exotic or unique eco-structures? Try to tie these areas of the world in with the remainder of the world.
- (v) Place animals or other creatures towards the top of the food chain. Place the lowest members of the food chain first (e.g. herbivores on Earth) then work to the higher order creatures.

(7) Develop the cultures.

- (i) Place the culture in the world at an appropriate location. Explore the interaction between the culture and the geographical/eco-structure the population finds itself in.
- (ii) What race will populate this culture?
- (iii) Look at the following items:
 - (a) Resources (physical/lifeforms/spiritual/magical)
 - (b) Subsistence patterns
 - (c) Religion
 - (d) Technology level
 - (e) Social structure
 - (f) Symbolism (architecture/art/mysticism)

(8) Tie the cultures together.

- (i) Is there competition for resources?
- (ii) How flexible are the cultures?
- (iii) Have past climatic or geological events influenced the culture (e.g. big floods, ice ages, comet impacting on planet, angry gods, etc.)?

- (iv) How quickly do the races reproduce?
- (v) Are there religious, political, or ethnic conflicts or incompatibilities?
- (vi) Write the histories of each of these cultures.

(9) Although you may have considered them previously, take particular care to highlight “special” aspects of your world. (In other words, what things make your world truly unique? Why would someone want to play in your world in particular?)

- (i) Are there unique races or species?
- (ii) Do the races have special symbiotic relationships?
- (iii) Are there periodically repeated geological, cosmological or climatic events?
- (iv) Does your world have unique aspects to the magical or psionic manipulation or use?

(10) Let your world sit, and do not look at it or think about it for at least two weeks. Then go back and look at it. Is it logical and internally consistent from a cosmological, historical and ecological standpoint? Here is a brief list of some questions to ask:

- (i) Are there lots of caves filled with large creatures with no food source? Why? How?
 - (ii) Are there burning deserts next to glaciers? Why? How?
 - (iii) If the good gods/desses are so darn powerful, why are there still evil entities around?
 - (iv) Why doesn't the water spill off the edge of the world?
 - (v) How far can you see? Where is the horizon? Why?
 - (vi) Is there enough fertile ground to support the population?
 - (vii) Why did the high technology races allow the low tech races to survive? Do they compete for resources? (Think about it! Maybe there are religious or cultural issues involved.)
- (11) Develop the PCs to take advantage of or highlight unique aspects of your world.
- (12) Introduce maguffins in the campaign to help PCs explore interesting areas and relationships in your world.
- (13) Be willing to ad lib, but as before, write it down so you remember it!

F) Helpful hints for designing a Top-Down World

- (1) All those NPCs and “schtuff” — they are all imaginary, really!
- (2) Be willing to modify part of the world later if it proves to be inconsistent. But, carefully consider the effects of doing so BEFORE you dig out the eraser! Items in a fantasy world just as in the real world tend to be connected in ways we poor mortals cannot hope to see without very deep thought. Unfortunately, you, a mortal, will not see all of the interconnections right away. But, fear not! If there is an advantageous one for the PCs, they will spot them at the worst possible time!
- (3) Make lots of notes in the creation process. Writing down your thoughts tends to organize and crystallize them.
- (4) The more different your world is from Earth, the more exotic and interesting it will be, but it will also be harder to visualize and referee.
- (5) Start small! Do not go out and develop a Jupiter sized planet as your first project.

(6) Humans are multi-sensed creatures. Be willing to use visual and audio items to help suspend disbelief and draw the players into your world as well as using good dialog.

(7) Develop the cosmology and physical world to completion or near completion, but only develop outlines or skeletons for cultures which the gaming group will most likely never encounter. Spend 80 percent of your time developing things that the party is likely to spend 80 percent of its time interacting with!

8) How to organize an FRP World

A) Get a bunch of binders. The easiest way to organize is to break up the world into a bunch of smaller portions.

B) Here are several sample organizational schemes:

(1) By geography...

(2) By historical era...

(3) By culture...

(4) By race...

(5) Any combination of the above...

C) Index your world early on, or it will become an insurmountable task later on.

D) Always include a brief description of what a binder contains at the beginning. Ten years from now, you are unlikely to remember it contains "samples of Overmannish wedding garb from the Huvis-Kanine era.

9) Conclusion:

Stomp and shout and applaud! Give generously! I have a family to support!

Please send questions and comments to: rstaats@mail.lmi.org

Thank you,

In service,

Rich Staats

REFUGEE # -I

George Phillies
87-6 Park Avenue
Worcester MA 01609
508-754-1859(h,a)
508-831-5334(o)
Internet:phillies@wpi.wpi.edu At any hour, try o first.

The contents of this zine include fiction and commentary. I would include *Communications*, Letters to the Editor, in which I publish letters or comments from correspondents, if by some chance I ever received one from the readership.

Commentationes

Editorial Page: Actually, if you look through recent issues, it is not that hard to see why an unlucky random sample would leave the impression we talked about nothing but Money: The Gathering.

The Log That Flies: Well, the people who trademarked Nazi, at least until a Federal judge found out about it, do not appear to have made themselves quite as unpopular with the net as did the Green Card lawyers. At least, I have not yet heard about large-scale mailbombings against these people or sites transmitting their mis-sives. Has TSR in fact gotten anyplace with their efforts to tell people to do FTP with them? Or are they largely having the same effect on the Net that they previously had on APAe and wargaming groups? As I read major rolegaming APAe, it would not have occurred to me that Advanced D&D sells very well, and your estimate that it is the best-selling rolegaming system in the world shows how different an APA audience is from the general consumer audience.

It would be of some interest to see what effect these letters are having on the rolegaming magazine situation. There are few non-corporate rolegaming zines, other than APAe, to begin with.

The Two Steves is somethat sad, and more than a little strange. It would appear that there is a point at which SJG might have been better off not to continue working on a WW GURPS object. On the other hand, sometimes there are reasons for having an American contract that spells out absolutely everything, rather than a Japanese contract that leaves everything vague. If the agreement says 'provides' data in mag format, there is indeed not an agreement to let the phrasings of that data be used further; this is a good example of a case in which either

American contract law (which spells out supplying and using over 36 pages) or the Japanese custom (in which both sides have talked enough to know exactly what the other side is planning) might sometimes prevent difficulties.

With respect to death, Worcester is fuller and fuller of terminally insane drivers. There may once have been rules of the road, but residents of Taxachusetts have never heard of them. Best of luck getting players for your new game.

Session Notes: 'Intelligence is what the test measures.' ahh, but is it determined by heredity or environment? (In extreme cases, yes. Efforts to administer the test to child-abused chimpanzees caught in the midst of an artillery bombardment find that the chimps are really not very bright.) Your story was interesting, though it was hard to tell where you were going with it. I was not sure why the hero decided to stay on Earth, but the Earth around him was sufficiently a distopia as to distract me from following his character.

Who is John Galt: Sorry to hear about your car. I seem to see more and more people ignoring traffic lights, right of ways, and general good sense. The attitude is summed up as: 'If you don't like my driving, why are you on my hood?', courtesy of Skeleton Key. My memories of California are much more favorable in terms of driving, but perhaps that is just a matter of time.

Tales from the Electric Underground: Your modules for different rules were interesting. One might be surprised that in a world with warfare at this level, there is still a serious interest in patent law, as mentioned in discussing the Strider 100.

The Eight Track Mind: While I recall suggestions that some purchasers of Magic have made enough of an investment to risk losing their shirt (They should buy something intelligent, like tulips.), your variant is a little more extensive than losing the 'shirt'. Of course, if you just want to play the game, there is no particular need to buy their cards, You can't xerox them (that would violate their copyright) but for most things a display of all known card and 3x5's with numbers indicating the species of card would appear to satisfy your desire to test odd decks.

'they're *monsters*.' And if they work very hard, they'll kill almost as many creatures as will a typical group of high levels cleaning out the first level of a dungeon. I think you made a good case that these games should be viewed as variants of cyberpunk: dark and unpleasant futures where one might not want to live.

Firestarter: An interesting set of characters. One might say that you have an officer, some non-commissioned

officers, the grunts and airmen, and the special forces/civilians. Of course, one can also have real civilians; if you are gaming a world, rather than the Sunnyvale Slashette Cyberpunk Superheroines, you may have some number of people who are there to interact with the campaign, but not interested in being soldiers in someone's army. It depends on your GM. Some GMJs want to run worlds; some say they want to run worlds, some want to say they run worlds, and, then, of course there are those to whom the players listen politely while they pull out the hex paper and ask which way to orient the six-fold axes. By the way, why are the inner pages of 'Firestarter' given a different title?

The officer/NCO/soldier/civilian pattern refers to players as well as characters. You may have a good team, in terms of the characters of the PCs, but if the players are not fond of having the same person lead all the time, the campaign may not do well. Similarly, always talking your way out of a situation can be all right, but if it always occurs off camera, or between runs, it can become a bit frustrating for the other players: you show up for a run, and everything has been changed around completely, so all the things that you were planning to do are no longer worth doing. You are perhaps overly doubtful about rebels. If the rebel's suggestions are ignored, but he sits and cheers as you fly, hop, swing, waddle... into battle, everyone may still be having an enjoyable time. Different people get very different things out of a campaign, even from the same event. Perhaps, however, my advice would be less useful for the traditional Runequest or 'Where is the Dungeon and how many levels does it have?' group.

Reading Companion: Your description of walking through dynastic marriages showed a very different face of gaming. I take it that we are walking through Glorantha using the Pendragon rules. What did the players appear to be getting out of what happened?

Skeleton Key: The character is very interesting. The introduction of the character to the world has the great virtue of eliminating many of the 'but my character would have known that' complaints. After all, whatever it is, the memory could have been erased. On the other hand, having the GM design the character means that the GM may miss out on the things that you would find most likely to make the character interesting. In my immediate former campaign, my GM was utterly unable to understand why I kept cranking up my character's teleport tange (at the very end, she could do ca. 18,000 km in one jump), and affected not to have a clue as to why my greatest annoyance was having him retcon out existence a specific power I had actually never used. The background certainly did sound complicated. The disadvantage, of course, is that the poor GM is obliged to come up with the complete background for a character, when he may not have the

complete background for the entire campaign worked out yet.

wrt to yr cts Tales, in my opinion the matter 'don't criticize something without reading it first' can be overstated. It was not clear to me that the Vampire material is likely to go as far as early Dungeons and Dragons, in which in many places the game was nothing but dungeon crawls. (This was not the local early experience, an event cushioned more than slightly by the two player characters and their 80 armed followers who tried entering the first level of a random-rolled dungeon. Several of them managed to get out alive. People carefully noted that entering a dungeon, even with a non-malicious Al Trevor running it, was an interesting way to die ingloriously.

Fiction

This is a novel fragment. It will go for a distance, and then quit.

"Contact between minds, save among the mageborn, is seldom so strong. Under your aura you have a mage's Gifts, so I actually saw your memories - those you willed to show me. Moonstruck lads and lasses share the emotion of sharing memories, not memories themselves."

"Grandoon, I'm no mage. I'm not mage-trained, no matter what I read." Her usual detached calm reasserted itself. "And never again is far too soon, so far as sharing minds like that is concerned." She still felt slightly sick, but managed to hide her discomfort. Abruptly she turned and resumed her march along the highway. He followed, trying to deduce what had offended her. Was it like being kissed for the first time? She could have found the experience so shocking as not to bear repeating. Or had there been something specific, some particular memory she intended to keep for herself?

* * * * *

They walked through the night. Neither wished to speak. Tegel-La was well past the zenith, its brilliance sufficient to read a scroll. The Nightstar, dimming and sparking every dozen heart-beats, followed by two hand-spans in Tegel-La's wake. Soon they'd want to camp. Elaine suddenly froze in midstride, gesturing in the same motion for Grandoon to halt. She listened intently.

"A horse's neigh," she whispered. "Well behind us. If it's on the pavement, the hooves are muffled."

Grandoon reached to his purse, withdrew a coin, and tossed it into the air. Elaine faded off the road, leaning against a tree to string her bow. Finally Grandoon spoke. "The Eye of Round is hard to deceive. We are followed, indeed on horses with muffled hooves, by six knights with colors masked, two men of the cloth, and a pair of winged sea-trolls. They carry a variety of modestly potent thau-

maturgic and spiritual protections. Baron Morgan! As usual, up to no good, save when he might be caught."

"Oh, great! He lives south of Arburg; he's not going home. It's a bit late for an after-dinner stroll, it being close to midnight. I can guess what he wants." She tapped the scabbard of her new sword. "I'm gonna fight eight guys on horseback, and two trolls, too? The eight guys, yeah, sure, but trolls are tough. And sea trolls are real good trackers. In daylight I could dodge'em, I think, but at night? No way. Not when I can't see, and they can. I suppose they've got extra horses?" Grandoon nodded. "Outrunning them's not real likely, either, not when I'm neither fresh nor completely unbruised. Well, don't think I expect you to risk your neck against that crew. You can fly off, but I'm stuck here. I could give'm the sword. Naww, they'd kill me, anyway. Besides, it's mine."

"Now, I only said that they had modestly potent protections against magic. When facing the Duke's overpaid amateurs, such trinkets would likely suffice. Against one of my professional skills, such protections are rather less effective. Would you fight the Baron one-on-one? His wards would require some preparation to disperse, short of violence that would level much of this forest, but his companions are less well shielded."

"Morgan?" Elaine grinned contemptuously. "I'll take that creep apart with bare hands. It's his army and trolls - they're a bit much."

They hid behind a line of trees. Grandoon raised a fresh illusion: images of him and Elaine standing in the road, close besides each other. A phantasmal Grandoon pointed with one hand at Tegel-La, but kept his other arm firmly wrapped around the phantasmal Elaine's waist. The images stared eye to eye, less interested in the sky than in each other. As the Baron's troop approached, the phantasmal Elaine pulled the phantasmal Grandoon closer and leaned into his shoulder.

The real Elaine fumed. Lean on Grandoon, indeed! Who did the phantasm think she was, anyway? Unlike Morgan, she could tell that the figures were unreal, but she still saw what Grandoon had them do next. She dearly wished she had the opportunity to kick Grandoon in the shins, hard. Not quite hard enough to break major bones, but hard. All she could do was scowl in his direction. Grandoon's smile betrayed him. Despite the imminence of battle, he was teasing her.

Baron Morgan smirked. His prey were too preoccupied to notice his approach. A single slice with one hand alerted his retainers. One raised a fist, palm rearwards; a signet ring glowed pale orange as it swallowed the beat of the horses' gallop. They charged down the road, three abreast. The sea trolls loped behind, fangs bared and wings outstretched.

Grandoon shook his head, acknowledging the talent of the Baron's hired magicians. He could see the Baron charge, horse's hooves striking sparks against the stone. Even against the quiet of the woods, nothing could be heard. The Baron's voice, the rattle of armor, the battle cries of the men - all were gone, swallowed by the ring's ensorcelments.

At the last instant, the illusionary Elaine opened her eyes and glanced over Grandoon's shoulder. The Baron saw her push Grandoon from the berm, struggling at the same time to draw her sword. Her speed was enough to frighten Morgan, but she was too late. His lance reached for her throat.

The lance pricked her form. She disappeared in a flurry of sparks, which scattered in all directions. At the same moment the illusionary Grandoon was swallowed by a concentric set of glowing rings which quickly shrank to nothing. The Baron reined in his horse. The disappearances were wizard's tricks, but if he recognized them aright, tricks only possible over small distances. Elaine must still be very close, well within the tracking range of his trolls. For all practical purposes, he had won. His men were protected against any direct assault by the mage. One girl on foot could hardly prevail against a dozen opponents. Very soon the sword would be his.

Grandoon rose from the brush to intone the final syllables of his cantrip. A cone of violet iridescence sprang from one finger and enveloped Baron Morgan's men. The glare illumined tree branches, throwing shadows up into the sky. Elaine shielded her eyes from the brilliance, waiting for the spell's effects to fade. The light became blindingly bright, then slowly faded. Baron Morgan and two lieutenants remained on horseback. Around them, men, mounts, and trolls had been reduced to a fine ash, gradually crumbling and falling to the pavement.

Grandoon cursed to himself. He had promised only the Baron would survive. Two of the Baron's retinue remained. Elaine didn't wait for an explanation. She knew he'd have one. No matter what happened, you could count on a mage to provide a completely rigorous rationalization of a spell's every effect - after the fact. She had little faith in mages' promises, no matter how carefully worded. At least she only had to fight three men, instead of eight. She drew her bow.

Her first arrow glanced from a lieutenant's shield. The second and third transfixed him and his companion. A further pair of arrows rattled off the Baron's chest. The Baron laughed, loudly, while his men slumped from their horses.

"Give up, little girl," he shouted. "I wear enchanted armor, proof against all missile weapons. Though you had the strength of Hercules, you could not pierce this mail. Now, yield! Give me your sword as weregeld for my men,

4
and I'll let you go on your way. Refuse, and I'll kill you, and take the sword anyway."

Grandoon stood quietly. He wanted to see Elaine's prowess in combat; now he had his chance. She had dismissed the Baron as a nothing, scarcely a challenge to fight. She could prove her words without his further assistance.

Elaine dropped back under a tree. The sword the Baron so coveted was suddenly in her right hand. The Baron waved his lance at her, forgetting altogether that Grandoon would witness the crimes he intended to commit. "Afraid?" he taunted. "Afraid to come out in the open? Or are you afraid of horses?" She glared back. "Well, then, we'll fight on foot. The light chain you wear is scarcely a match for good plate. And don't think your sword is going to help. I wear a warding amulet, protecting me from the enchantments of all ensorcelled blades. Against me, your sword is no more than good steel." He dismounted, the joints in his plate armor squeaking.

Elaine yawned affectedly. "Morgan," she said playfully, "You need one more amulet. What you need," she jabbed ahead, sword point touching him lightly in the stomach, "is protection from beer schooners. Lots of protection from beer schooners."

"Impudent brat! What you need, more than all else, is instruction - in proper respect for your betters."

They circled each other cautiously. The Baron stood a head taller than she. He charged, trying to use his weight and height to break down her guard. She stood her ground. They had not fought before. She was confident that he did not know her strength. As she blocked each of the Baron's blows, she felt her blade shift eerily in her grip. The sword was enchanted, then, even if its magic was ineffective against the Baron.

As they fought, part of her mind assessed the balance between them. The Baron was as slow and weak as she'd expected; his only real advantage was his armor. She tried a feint, luring the Baron toward her. He swung as she desired. She parried, preparing the counterblow. Suddenly she felt her blade shift against her grip, letting him through her defense. There passed an instant of recognition - the enchantment was a curse, waiting for the optimal moment to reveal itself - before he connected.

Her mail held, but his blow caught her in the ribs, still bruised from the previous day's encounter. Stunned by the shock, she dropped entirely into the defense, trying to hold him away. Her vision a red fog of pain, she could barely see his attacks. Sensing his advantage, he pressed in with a flurry of swings. For long moments, just holding him off left her stretched to the limit. She blocked; her sword tried to help him.

Then, suddenly, the struggle was over. The Baron lay unconscious, new dents in helm and breastplate marking her final strikes. In the end, she'd gone after him almost recklessly, beating through his guard time and time again. She couldn't remember that he'd connected against her, not after the first blow to the ribs; now that he was on the ground, she was staggering. He had been a feeble opponent, she considered. Her sword had more than compensated for his lacks.

Grandoon came to her side. "Ought I not bind your wounds?" he asked. His fingers searched out a bruise on her shoulder.

"Oh, come on." She forced herself to speak, then leaned almost drunkenly out of his grip. "I'm not gonna die, just because I got a couple cuts. I, I'm not even really bleeding, much, just bruised some more. But take care of him." She gestured at the fallen Baron. "So he's a crook. He's the Duke's crony. If something happened to him, there'd be too many questions, and who ever believes my side of a story? No matter half the daughters in his domain would cheer at news of his passing. If he's alive, he'll keep quiet, and cover up for all of us, lest someone ask what he was doing here - after all, those piles of ash used to be important people."

She wished Grandoon would shut up and go away. She squeezed her eyes closed, remembering other times when she had been safely by herself, and not forced to make a show of courage.

"The sword?" Grandoon asked as he stood over the Baron, making passes with his staff.

"Cursed." Her voice sagged. "Strong, too. That's how he kept getting through. I kept missing him, and not hitting, and not hurting him when I hit." His back was to her. She slipped off her helmet and pressed fingers against her cheeks, trying to force back the tears. Sweat stung the corners of her eyes. "I wish, I mean, I'd really wanted something a little better than this." She peered away into the woods, staring into a faded distant tangle of grays and blacks.

"I observe that you stand, while he reposes on his backside." Grandoon spoke without facing her. Mortals, he recalled, tended to forget that a mage's inner eye saw equally well in all directions. From her pose, she wanted the illusion of privacy; he could see no reason not to grant it. "I suppose he's accustomed to having his bully boys go into battle for him. The others were just that - personal retainers and thugs, men of importance, not men who'll be missed by independent allies. There's a glade a little farther ahead. I'd thought to camp there. Will you stay with me again?"

"Stop already?" Grandoon nodded, then waited while she gathered her things. "Grandoon," she asked, "How'd you

like a cursed sword? I'd leave it for him - serve him right - but he'd be too suspicious. You must know some use for it. I still have Startouch." Having named her old sword, still in its shoulder-scabbard, she touched its pommel, acknowledging its faithful company.

* * * * *

The glade rolled gently down to a deep brook. Little streamers of fog rose from the water into the autumn air. Despite Tegel-La's glare, the sky glittered with brilliant stars, hovering in clots and tangles close above the earth. Elaine, shoulders slumped, listened to the mage.

"You will stay with me tonight, won't you?" he urged.

"Out here in the woods? Naaw, I'd get soft - like you. Besides, I'm gonna bathe first - or should I be afraid of the water?" Her last question was baited. They were far enough from habitation for the water to be safe for washing and drinking. To her taste, Grandoon took an unreasonable number of precautions against lurking wild animals.

"Hardly. Not so close to Arburg. Isn't it a little chill, a nip of frost almost in the air? Surely one in your condition ought have better shelter than a few blankets?" Grandoon asked.

"Oh, just quit pestering me! I'm not some court lady, to need pampering every moment like an Imperial Lap-cat."

"As you wish." He ignored her while she disappeared down-hill. With one boot he scraped an area free of leaves, then produced from his pack a toy house the size of an orange. The house he set in the middle of the cleared patch. He tapped its chimney with his finger, pointed in a circle at the ground, and withdrew his hand. His cabin sprang up before him, reaching in a few moments its full size. Without even a glance over his shoulder, he stepped inside and pulled shut the door.

The fireplace held a burning log, blazing as though Grandoon had spent the evening sitting before it. A pot of tea, freshly brewed, and warmed bread waited on a tray by the fireside. A distant hiss was the water-tube boiler, drawing water from the outside via displacement gate and heating it for Grandoon's bath.

Grandoon shed his cloak and turned to the large mirror over his workbench. At a touch it frosted, then cleared to reveal Elaine walking toward the brook. Grandoon snapped his fingers, pointing as he did at a bronze mask on the facing wall. The mask's jaw lowered; its mouth pursed. Its graven eyes looked from side to side, finally alighting on the mirror.

"Observe!" commanded Grandoon. "She goes to the stream, bathes, eats, and sleeps. When she sleeps, or if aught else occurs, call." The mask followed Grandoon's

words, its eyes shifting slightly to the rhythm of his voice.

In the mirror, Elaine could be seen tiptoeing through the woods, slipping from shadow to shadow as though the Baron might be lurking behind the next tree. Once she stopped, peering intently behind her. She saw nothing, heard nothing. Had he been looking, Grandoon would have seen her stare directly through his mirror. What was it? she wondered. Was someone watching her?

Minutes later, she stood shoulder deep in water, washing a slight cut in her neck. Her armour lay on the bank. Elaine held her cloak in the water, bringing together edges frayed and sliced in combat. She touched two matching pieces of cloth together; the tear disappeared in a seamless mend. She smiled. The cape was a favorite possession. It was also the only magic item which had ever worked for her. Her eyes went blank as she recalled a young man, tall and thin with pale yellow eyes, pressing it on her as a gift. She had been so reluctant to take it, but had treasured it ever since.

The cloak was whole again. The chill of the water brought her back to reality. She peered into the glade, still convinced that she was being watched. After the evening's events, she was slightly afraid of Grandoon. She was confident that her protections would stand against any direct thaumaturgic attack he might launch. However, he had wandered casually through her mind, tugging at her memories, reminding her of events which she had wished long forgotten. Worse, he had done her a favor, killing half the Baron's party. He would not be the first mage to expect every favor to be repaid, preferably in an unacceptably physical way.

Her sleeping cloak rested on a bank of pine needles. Travelling clothes hung from the branch, drying slowly; she wore only a short, sleeveless tunic. Waves of fatigue rolled over her. For minutes she stared at the cloak, too tired even to lie down. She could see the events of the past few days as a unified whole, with those she had aided turning seriatim against her.

Disappointment brought greater pain than did the bruises from ambush and duel. She thought distantly of Grandoon, who was forever trying to drag her off to bed. For all his desires, he had more-or-less always been a gentleman. After all, she was hardly the beauty that his more notorious loves had been. Stiff with cold, she knelt, wrapped herself in the cloak, and nestled her head against her pack. Alone at last, no longer needing to pretend that she felt neither pain nor sorrow, she cried bitter tears until she floated off to a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER THREE (Archimagus Primus)

Grandoon snored gently, alone in his bed. His pose was an affectation. An archmage's immortal body needed the slightest of rests to recover from the strains of the day.

For the mind, a few hours of dreams would suffice. Most of the night would be spent waiting, watching, thinking. Grandoon's eyes might be closed, but magesight revealed every part of his cottage in finer detail than normal vision could ever perceive. To his inner eye, the fire of the Presence, the hidden power which underlies all sorcery, burned as bright as day. His books and scrolls glowed soft pastels; potions on the far wall shimmered with hidden light. The clockwork on his worktable encaged starry constellations. And Elaine?

He set his inner eye across the glade toward her. Every thing has an aura. Hers was violet-black, hinting at untapped power, but power now quiescent, doing no more than scattering any spell set against it. If he had not known precisely where she slept, magesight would have found her peculiarly difficult to locate. An aura, thought Grandoon, should have structure, revealing its roots the way the grain of fine-polished wood names the tree from which it was cut. Elaine's aura was featureless as fresh-cast silver, lacking even the patina of age.

From where had Elaine come? For all Grandoon had learned, she had no past, as though she'd stepped from Heaven within the past month. His ignorance was not for want of effort. When he returned to the Academy, his fellow mages would ask how a city so well-protected as Arburg-am-Tressin had fallen so quickly. Its defenders had been somewhat disorganized, but should have held longer than they did. The Academy drew a sizable part of its income from the construction of defensive spellworks of the highest quality, spellworks such as those which had failed to protect Arburg. If those works had an unknown flaw, found by accident during the siege, part of the Academy's enormous royalty income would be jeopardized.

Grandoon's workbench was lined with memory crystals, each carefully engraved from the mind of an eyewitness. The task facing him this night was to organize the memories into a coherent whole, transforming a mishmash of observations into consistently patterned facts. The outline of events was clear, but excessive curiosities remained. Elaine's role in the city's fall was inexplicably large.

The first interesting observations dated to six weeks past. There had been a Republican revolt in Arburg. The Guilds, led in many cases by their own Syndics, had risen against the lawful authority of their Duke, His Clergy, and most especially His Loyal Mages. The Duke fled over city walls, clad in a nightgown. The clergy talked swiftly, or saw their temple treasures donated involuntarily to the people. The mages of the peaceful town of Arburg-am-Tressin had spent their days enchanting potions, most learning barely enough battle magic to swat a stray mosquito. Confronted with an angry mob, such mages bent to its will, fled, or perished. Further north, where all mages knew battle magic as a matter of course,

the mob might have fared very differently. Further north, Pyrrin sent armies, not demagogues, to take cities.

Arburg-am-Tressin had been subverted by agents of the Archmage Pyrrin — Grandoon still found it difficult to think of a favorite student as the Apostate, the Antimage, the Abomination, the Supreme Enemy of Civilization — no matter the curses his fellow Academicians might utter — and his so-called League of Democracies. Grandoon had traced essential details of the subversion. Infiltrating the city, Pyrrin's spies sought out those Syndics most vulnerable to enchantment, inflaming their minds against the ordained order of the world. For a city to replace one group of nobles with another, replace nobles with other masters, even elected ones, or put up or set down a cult was not so unusual. But once a land was enrolled in the League, it could never depart, nor change its style of government without Pyrrin's leave, leave which was never granted. Worse, Pyrrin demanded that no mages, save those loyal to him, could reside freely in the territories of the League; all others must be exiled or carefully chained. Grandoon and the Academy found Pyrrin's demands unbearable.

The revolt filled the city with rioting mobs, all too susceptible to the mass hypnotic methods which were Pyrrin's specialty. Hypnotic spells, easy to forestall, could not take defended towns while mages worked protective wards. Against a city in chaos, hypnotic spells were admirably effective. Years of work had been needed to place the kindling. Once the fire began, the city fell to Pyrrin's rioters in a single heady evening. Ducal levies, raised from the outer valley, put the city to siege.

Grandoon checked his rush through others' memories. The Archtyrant's hirelings were active in every corner of the world, stirring up trouble wherever they might. The Duke of Arburg was an idiot, whose every pronouncement diminished the store of human wisdom. For Pyrrin to attack the Duke of Arburg was no surprise. The anomaly came much later, during the siege itself.

Arburg-am-Tressin had the most powerful defenses in the Duke's domains. Its granaries were full; its shields against sorcery were well-maintained. Even with all his levies behind him, the Duke's siege was not assured of success. More to test the defenses than in hope of victory, the Duke launched a two-pronged attack against the city. The main assault was bloodily repulsed. The diversionary attack on the North Gate — the most heavily fortified point of the city's walls — succeeded beyond all expectation, capturing the tower and opening the city gates. Once a foothold was established within the city, counterspells set by the Duke's mages dissipated Pyrrin's enchantments, freeing the street mobs from Pyrrin's thrall. With common sense restored, the rebellion crumbled.

The anomaly was the fall of the North Gate. No tower

of wood or stone, unless shielded against magic, could long survive the attentions of even a third rate sorcerer. The North Gate had been protected by powerful spell dampers, great mechanisms of crystal and wrought iron locked securely in the bowels of the gate tower. So long as they functioned, any conventional spell-sending would soundlessly flicker to nothing without harming the gates themselves.

On each side of the gate itself rose a column of spell ports - windows a yard wide through which defending mages might send maledictions against their foes. Permanent runes of guard kept out arrows, and assured that anyone trying to enter a port would be blasted by a thunderbolt. Elaine had been first up a ladder in an early assault. Not bothering to try for the top of a wall, she had jumped through an open port. The man following her up the ladder remembered that the thunderbolt had, seemingly, had no effect on her. Within the room, two guards fell to her sword; a third survived to describe what then ensued. In dying, the guards gave the defending mage enough time to raise a spell against Elaine. He invoked the Rune of Death Ascendant - enough to slay three hundred unprotected men - without success. Seeing that his own death was nigh, he then shattered his staff against her. The resulting cone of destruction melted steel fittings half-way across the room, yet failed to scorch her clothing.

Tower security was provided by shifting flame barriers which drew their heat from a central source. The journeyman mage controlling the flames watched from his distant room, while telltales reported Elaine's march through one barrier after another. A mage who saw her progress and lived - there were oddly few of these - said that her aura drank the flames, so that she and her armor were untouched by fires that could instantly turn bronze to water. Of course, reflected Grandoon, there had been few mages within Arburg, since few mages were foolish enough to support Pyrrin's despotism. Most mages native to Arburg had fled the instant they learned that the city was swearing loyalty to Pyrrin's League. Details gathered here and there suggested that Elaine still harbored a specific hatred of those mage-born who supported Pyrrin.

Elaine took the guards at the spell-dampers by surprise. The door to the vault was heavily warded; the wards vanished at Elaine's touch. Grandoon suspected that a solid crossbar would have been more effective than the spell-locks. Before they could so much as stand, five men fell to Elaine's hand-and-a-half sword. The others found that she wielded the blade one-handed with the grace and speed of a duelling master demonstrating a fencing foil. Despite five-to-one odds in their favor, the remaining guards put home only a few blows before she struck them down.

One guard survived by feigning death. He saw Elaine shatter damper controls with mailed fist, then hold the

door against reinforcements sent to restore the dampers. The defenders directed increasingly desperate attacks with pike and sword against her. The Duke's men, backed by wall-shattering spells, fought their way through the tower, down to the vault. There they found a corridor littered with dead. Elaine, gravely wounded, was holding her own against four men in heavy armor.

The surgeons assured Grandoon that one injured so badly as Elaine could not live without the aid of sorcery. Since the aura in which she shrouded herself blocked all curative spells, the surgeons saw no hope for her recovery. Grandoon, curious as to the nature of her protection against magic, ordered that her wounds be staunched, that she be made comfortable, and waited for her to die. In the instant that she yielded herself to death, her protections would doubtless fail, allowing him to penetrate her secrets. He witnessed instead her miraculously swift recovery. She slept for a day and a half, ate ravenously, stood on the third day, and by the fourth was back on her feet, albeit with a distinct limp.

Grandoon watched her closely. A person whose natural protections against sorcery stopped thunderbolts and Death Runes would be a useful tool in the struggle against the Apostate, assuming her inclinations remained on the side of justice and virtue. A similar person whose inclinations instead responded to Pyrrin's not-insignificant treasury might be a significant foe. Elaine accepted his less romantic attentions, most notably the lure of his library. She was happy to discuss magecraft, geography, history - excepting only her modest part in it - indeed, she would discuss almost anything except her own past. She affected the language, though not the manners, of a mercenary sell-sword. While she was lost in thought, her speech became genteel.

Grandoon found her to be an enchanting conversationalist, far more knowledgeable than he expected of someone of her age. Of her family and past life, she dropped only oblique hints. When asked about the siege, she said she'd fought a few guards, most of whom she'd taken by surprise. Then the Duke's men rescued her. She denied all talent at spell-casting. If she could command the Presence, even very slightly, she was scrupulously careful to hide the fact. Most men-at-arms could summon firespark well enough to light dry tinder, though they denied that Firespark was sorcery. She carried flint and steel, and was adept at their use.

Grandoon suspected that she, or some unseen patron, actually used much magic, while being excruciatingly careful to avoid notice. Her passage through the tower could be explained by the protection of an amulet of great potency. Grandoon himself, or any other truly first-rate mage, could have destroyed the spell-dampers using her approach. Grandoon would have preferred other methods against the tower, ones affording a higher degree of

personal safety to the attacker, but Elaine's resistance to sorcery was not unique. The Duke of Arburg had reckoned himself safe because the world contained at most dozens of first-rate mages, none of whom would plausibly take arms against him before other mages would come to the Duke's aid.

Elaine's bladesmanship was possible for a master wielding an enchanted sword. Startouch, alas, seemed entirely free of enchantments, at least the sorts that Grandoon knew how to detect. Elaine's recovery after the siege was slightly short of miraculous, save by unseen enchanted intervention. Her recovery from yesterday's altercation was almost equally impressive. Her approach to the city was at best improbable. She had met a southern contingent of archers, been invited to share a campfire, and paid for her meals with good coin. The men remembered her as a runaway farmboy, young, with an impressive set of weapons. Then they ignored her. Her cloak had hidden her figure; seemingly, they had not noticed her sex. Female sell-swords were not unknown, but militiamen three days from wives and lovers were usually aware of a woman's presence.

To Grandoon's inner eye, the archers' memories appeared faded, bleached by some outside force, so the men barely remembered Elaine. A week after the siege, her presence in their midst had been forgotten. Grandoon could find no trace of any spell affecting the archer's minds. More surprising still, no one had noticed her before she met the archers. She had travelled busy roads. Any competent mage should have noted the peculiarity of her aura, but no one had marked her passage.

Elaine's armor was well-forged, but quite free of inlaid spells. Only her clothing was touched with the Presence. It was an Irrilesi weave, the sea-elves' enchantments making it both self-cleaning and self-repairing. Out of Irrilesi hands, the cloak was a rarity, though one only a skilled magician would recognize. Elaine claimed the cloak to be a gift from a friend.

Elaine's feats in battle were almost beyond belief, for one without thaumaturgic aid. Without magical armaments, how could she fight two men at once, let alone five? Most swordswomen depended on speed and talent to compensate for superior male weight; Elaine seemed to have passed to some higher level of talent. If she could teach others her skill with the sword, it would put a definite crimp in the sale of enchanted blades, hurting Grandoon himself – not to mention the Academy – in the pocket-book.

He had tried crystomancy, looking back in time to watch her fight. The gatetower eluded him. Of her encounter in Arburg, only her swim across the Tressin could be visualized clearly. Perhaps a very strong man could do what she had done, and be no more than a little tired

afterwards. However, only the greatest of swordsmen – all men whom Grandoon could name – could fight five competent opponents at once and have a victory. In the tower, Elaine had done that, more than once. But great swordsmen were seldom interested in the details of magecraft, in the differences between naming a rune, calling a rune, and becoming a rune – taking an aspect of a rune into one's being. Elaine was curious about all of those things, at a technically sophisticated level. Grandoon let his puzzlement fade as he thought of other things. Soon he would return to the Academy, to re-enter the rationality of academic politics based on unlimited tenure without retirement for age.

Session Notes #21

Douglas E. Forenby



Miss Macbeth

Horror seems an appropriate topic for consideration in the October issue of *IR*. I've had a long-standing interest in horror, although it took a while before I integrated that interest in to role playing games. When I was younger (actually *before* RPGs existed), I loved watching horror movies. During my years of penance in South Dakota, I lived in a place where several different television markets overlapped. On Saturday nights I could start watching "Boo Theater" at 2230 and usually get in two or three horror movies before 0200. Needless to say, most of these movies were Very Bad. Some of my favorites were the B-movie "creature features" from the 1950s (such as *Them*).

Creatures actually play an important role in a great deal of horror, whether it's a werewolf, giant ants, intelligent rats, frogs, supernatural horrors, or amorphous blobs. In my experience, though, the most important creature one can use in a horror game is a fish. A herring. A *red* herring, to be exact.

Allow me to backtrack for a minute. Although I had dabbled with a horror element in some of my early fantasy campaigns (mostly a series of adventures that involved a vampire stalking a PC), it wasn't until *Call of Cthulhu* was released by Chaosium that I realized how compelling a horror atmosphere could be. My initial test run of *CoC* involved a very simple haunted house scenario. The folks playing had very little idea what to expect, and I concentrated more on evoking an atmosphere of suspense and curious phenomena than on sweating the mechanics of the system. The game went on for several hours. We were playing around a dining room table, with only a single overhead light. As time passed, it became darker and darker in the room, although none of us noticed as we were fully engrossed in the game. Finally, just as the ghostly manifestations were reaching their peak, my father walked in the room and said, "Are you still at it?" *Everyone* around the table jumped in surprise. It was incredible how on-edge we all were, just from describing an imaginary situation.

Since then I've played *CoC* a number of times; it still ranks among the most atmospheric games in the RPG pantheon. I noticed something upon repeated playing, however. Once players became more familiar with the game and the Cthulhu mythos, they developed a propensity for seeing Cthulhu under every bush. That is, every odd or curious thing that happened was interpreted as a manifestation of something Cthulhoid and dealt with as such. While this improved character survival somewhat, it also diminished the horror atmosphere

Sustainable Terror? I haven't done much with the **White Wolf** *Storyteller* system, other than a one-shot **V:tM** adventure. I wonder, though, how successful groups are at sustaining an atmosphere of horror over a period of time.

Calvin's father would no doubt point out that this is building character. ☺

Ahhh, for the halcyon days of youth! There must have been something I was missing by spending all that time at the gaming table.....but I can't think what it was right now.

of the game. To the extent that events became predictable or explicable, the feeling of dread and suspense diminished.

What I took away from this was that for horror to have the greatest impact, it needs to be unexpected to some degree. Sitting down to play *CoC* or *GURPS Horror* establishes a certain mindset among players, an expectation that unusual happenings will be related to some horrific agency. Because of this, some of my most successful "horror" adventures were actually run in *Daredevils* campaigns. There's nothing about the rules *per se* that makes horror harder or easier to do, but because of the diversity of adventures, players were much less inclined to suspect the supernatural until they were deeply involved. Another variation would be the "Scooby Doo" gambit, in which something would look to be *prima facie* supernatural, but actually turn out to be the cover for a very mundane sort of activity. In summary, there are many techniques that a ref can use to magnify the mood of a horror adventure, but in my experience, the most effective one is subtle misdirection.

Indoctrination (A Design For Living)

Despite all the slaving anticipation I manifested in *IR #6* for *Castle Falkenstein*, it appears I'm going to have to wait until sometime in 1995 to gratify my lusts. Our local group got together yesterday to play *History of the World*, and in the process of discussing the upcoming *CF* campaign realized that travel, domestic obligations, and course demands would prevent us from playing on even a biweekly basis until sometime in January. ☹ As a result, we have fallen back on the expedient of meeting periodically for multi-player board games over the next few months.

I'm wondering if this is a concern for other *IR* contributors and if so, how you handle it. I realize the days are long gone when I could block out 12-13 hours every single Saturday to run two back-to-back RPG campaigns. Still, it seems like it should be possible to pull together a game on more than a quarterly basis. Part of the problem is the other things intruding on playing time are mostly adult, pro-social things. Those of us teaching courses really *do* need to prepare lectures and grade papers or exams. People *do* need to travel to attend professional conferences, or to see family members. There are even those few, those happy few, who want to spend time with their spouses or significant others. Go figure. Confronted with the

Ethnicity: Of course, being Norwegian, it's almost impossible to raise a fuss in any event. ☺

Shameless Plug: If you haven't had a chance to play *HotW*, I recommend it highly. It's not every day I get to be both Genghis Khan and Ivan The Terrible in the same afternoon. ☺

obligations of mature adulthood, it's hard to raise a fuss and demand, "Why can't you make being a gaming geek more of a priority?"

Part of what makes board games more attractive (despite the need for everyone to learn all the rules, unlike an RPG) is that they're non-serial in nature. You sit down with a random group of 3-8 people, play the game for a few hours, and then you're done. No continuity, no problems with having to get exactly the same people together next week to pick up the game where you left off. Sometimes you don't finish the game (it wasn't until yesterday that we broke the terrible "Epoch VI Barrier" in *HotW*), but there's usually no pressure to resume it from the stopping point a week later (notice that we're *not* proposing to play *War In Europe* or *Terrible Swift Sword* as multi-player board games).

I wonder if I haven't gone in to a rut when it comes to RPG. It seems that for the last fifteen years or so, most of my thinking about RPG has been in terms of campaigns with long-term goals, multiple subplots, and extensive character continuity. Not all the games have turned out that way, but virtually all of the one-shot adventures I've planned have been convention games, not "real" games for the regular group. I associate non-serial campaigns with the "bad old days" of dungeon crawling. Whatever characters happen to be present meet in a tavern, then set forth to plunder a quasi-random dungeon for how ever many hours you have to play. Then things are over, and the next time you play it's a different set of characters. That's not really what I want from a game, although playing an unappealing game fairly often might be better than never playing a really great game. It sounds like the Prisoner's Dilemma, doesn't it?

Do any of you have non-serial campaign structures that work for you? How do you deal with people being unable to play on a regular basis? What happens to their characters? What if they are pivotal to an on-going plotline? I'd appreciate any feedback folks might like to offer. And in the meantime, I'll be working on a Politburo purge of Stalin in that *Russian Civil War* game.... ☺

Comments On Interregnum #6

Maranci: Thanks for your extensive coverage of the Net News regarding TSR, Inc™ and the SJG vs. White Wolf fracas. I find the entire TSR, Inc™ clampdown on FTP sites hard to take seriously.



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What with their paranoid abuse of trademarks in the past, I suppose it shouldn't come as a surprise, but it seems that even if they had a tenuous legal rationale for their threats, it's hardly putting a crimp in their target population. How many 10 year old munchkins are NetSurfing to download RPG utilities? Not many, I think.

The **Wonder** flyer was outstanding. I hope you get some great roleplayers in response to it.

Phillies: You have excellent taste in films, if you picked up George Pal's *War of the Worlds*. I loved the shots of the Flying Wing; they were accurate, too. It was just as effective against the Martians as it was against the Other Red Menace. ☺ Glad to see you're working on a new novel. I look forward to seeing how it evolves from the interesting beginning.

Pili: Thanks for the teaser on *Stargate*. I'll have to keep an eye peeled for that when it comes out. I'm going to second Pete's comment about your art, too. It is excellent. Are you creating it yourself?

Taylor: Read, but no further comment.

Meier: Thanks for the reviews, esp. the comic reviews. I stopped buying comics over a year ago, so it's interesting to get a sampling of what's out there now. Have you played *TOON* on any kind of regular basis? I'm curious, as I've never had much luck finding people to play a comedy-based game more than once or twice. Something about humor on demand, I guess.

Greene: Great art on your title page -- I don't recall the original source, but that comic is a classic. You really took off and ran with the humor theme, too. I got a hearty chuckle out of *GURPS Austin*, esp. the idea of using it as the Village. "Who is Number One, y'all?" ☺

Collier: I enjoyed reading your thoughts on the members of teams, esp. since I don't read *AC* very often, and hence missed your columns therein. I certainly recognize many of the roles you describe. Do you find that the same people tend to assume the same roles, regardless of character or setting?



Dunham: Your sidebars are very effective and helpful in following the development of your campaign. It's a great way to include background and observations without breaking up the narrative flow.

Hoberman: *Outstanding* quotes from your Supers experience, David! I was laughing out loud as I read them. Also, greetings to Elizabeth McCoy, your guest columnist. I don't think I've ever had a character in a campaign who wanted amnesia as part of her/his background, so this was all new ground to me. Thanks for sharing some interesting ideas.

All: *Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.* I realize that this is a mighty "lite" issue, content-wise, but a combination of limited response time and lots of obligations at work left me wondering if I would have anything to contribute. My apologies to anyone who feels slighted on comments. I hope to have more developed thoughts for future issues.



COMMENTS ON INTERREGNUM #4

Virgil S. Greene:

re *Dune*: There is a board game for *Dune*. I had fun playing it in the early '80's with some friends. I know that an expansion set or two were printed for it, but am not sure if they are still in print.

re comment Peter Maranci:

The one Interactive Literature/Live Action Role Playing game that I have played in was a blast. (*Home of the Bold* at RuneQuest Con.) I also thought that I would prefer table top to live action. I now don't prefer one over the other, but they both definitely have their place. I was extremely burnt out at the end of my one experience at LARP, but look forward to the next one I can play in.

Robert W. Butler Jr.:

I had a blast reading your Sky Warriors flight; that must have been an unforgettable experience for you.



COMMENTS ON INTERREGNUM #5

Peter Maranci:

re *A Brief Introduction to Live Roleplaying*: A well written and informative essay. Have you considered submitting it to a professional publication?

Gilbert Pili:

re comment Curtis Taylor: I don't think of my friends as real heroes, they are Cthulhu fodder. I mean, uh, cannon fodder.

Dale Meier:

re Is White Wolf Going Too Far?:

I am not a fan of White Wolf's games, this is because I have not had the opportunity play the games, not because I don't want to. I would like the option to play their games in the future, though. I would also like the option to play other games in the future.

There is a movement abroad in this country to limit the amount of violence that is ingested by children and teenagers. Some people even think that cartoons are too violent for children. *Toon* is a game based on these violent cartoons. Does this make *Toon* a socially un-redeeming game? Does this mean *Toon* is providing a bad image for RPGs in the public eye?

I believe that both *Star Wars* and *Paranoia* are violent games. What makes them any better than the occult based games? Is it OK for PCs and NPCs to lose their lives, but not their lives and souls in these RPGs?

You express a desire to play certain RPGs at the end of your essay. Let me say, again, I would also like the opportunity to play certain RPGs.

Let's remember; they are only games. If a person cannot distinguish between a game and reality, I think the person is the problem, not the game.

Interestingly, a similar 'bad boy' attitude is being expressed by some mountain bike companies at this time. Pushing the bike and your abilities to the limit without regard for the consequence is becoming more and more common in advertising text. Questioning this attitude has been done in some editorials and letters in various cycling magazines. The one sane belief generally widespread throughout is the use of a helmet.

Scott Ferrier:

I think that you and your singing gorp hsunchen should both be the official scurvy mascots for *Interregnum*.



COMMENTS ON INTERREGNUM #6

re POGs: No, I did not see that story. There are many schools here in

RUNEOUEST 3 CULTS

R 0 ※ ■ ⊙ ▢ ✕ + ※ ▣ ▨ ✕ R 0 ※ ■ ⊙ ▢ ✕

Colophon: Produced on my friendly Macintosh Quadra 660AV (20/230) (AKA ~~Quattro~~) using Microsoft Word 5.1. Graphics courtesy of New Heights, 10483 South Amaryllis, Sandy, UT 84094. Printed on my rusty HP DeskWriter. Photocopied and collated for inclusion in *Interregnum* #7 by Peter Maranci.

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CULT	RUNES	THEATER	SOURCE
Aldrya	☐□X	Aldryami/The Grower	Elder Secrets
Annilla	〇●≡	tides/secret powers	Troll Gods
Aranea	▽●*	spiders	Troll Gods
Argan Argar	H●III山	troll merchants	Troll Gods
Arkat (troll aspect)	●R	sorcery	Troll Gods
Bagog	W▽△	chaos scorpion queen	White Wolf #22
Black Sun	●.:	anti-Yelm folk religion	Troll Gods
Bloody Tusk	†□▽	tusk riders	Elder Secrets
Cacodemon	W I †	anarchy/murder/ogres	Elder Secrets
Caladra & Aurelion	□〇XIII	volcanic fertility/harmony	TotRM #7
Chalana Arroy	III X III	healing & comfort	River of Cradles
Crimson Bat	〇W	crimson bat	TotRM #8
Daka Fal	△△△	ancestor worship	River of Cradles
Donandar	III△.:	music & dance	White Wolf #18
Dorasta	□☐III	Dorastor grain goddess	Dorastor: Land of Doom
Dormal	H≡△	sailors & sailing	TotRM #10
Ernalda	X□□III	earth mother	RQ Deluxe Edition
Gagarth	I 〇 †	senseless violence	TotRM #4
Gorakiki	▽●	mother of insects	Troll Gods
Himile	●●	cold and ice	Troll Gods
Humakt	† Y †	death/war/anti-undead	TotRM #5
Hungry Ghosts	△†	un-satiated spirits	TotRM #9
Issaries	△III H	communication/trade	River of Cradles
Kyger Litor	△●	troll mother	Troll Gods or Trollpak
Lhankor Mhy	Y△	knowledge	River of Cradles
Lodril	〇I	volcanoes/male peasants	White Wolf #20
Magasta	△≡≡†	Lord of the Sea	TotRM #10
Maran Gor	†■I	earthquake	TotRM #6
Mee Vorala	●☐	fungus/dark elves	Troll Gods
Moorgarki	△●	jungle troll mother	Troll Gods
Mostal	△△△□	Mostali/The Maker	Elder Secrets
Orlanth (Sartar aspect)	△△△山	King of the Gods/storm	Heroes Vol I, #4
Orlanth (Zola Fel aspect)	△△△山	King of the Gods/storm	River of Cradles
Pamalt	山†	Earth-King of Pamaltela	TotRM #11
Storm Bull (Urox)	†△▽	chaos killer/berserker	River of Cradles
Subere	●●R	first darkness	Troll Gods
Telmor	▽△(W)	wolf hsunchen	Dorastor: Land of Doom
Thanatar	†●YW	head hunter/knowledge theft	Shadows on the Borderland
Uleria	X X	love	Different Worlds #38
Xentha	●山	night	Troll Gods
Xiola Umbar	●III X	protective darkness	Troll Gods
Yelm	X〇〇†	sun/nobles	White Wolf #16
Yelmadio	〇Y	sky/soldiers	Sun County
Zola Fel	≡△XIII	Zola Fel River	River of Cradles
Zong	†III	hunters (troll)	Troll Gods
Zorak Zoran	●†I	hate/anti-chaos/anti-law	Troll Gods

山III〇.: 父I 〇III△※△† 山III〇.: 父I 〇III△※△† 山III〇.: 父I 〇III△※△†

Strange Sands

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Ah, October. The days are cold and bright, the nights spooky: the perfect time of year for roleplaying. I've been gearing up to play for awhile, and it looks as if the pieces are starting to fit together for a *Harn* campaign. Brutal battles on drizzly moors, ambushes on muddy trails, whispers in the ear of the local baron, incantations mumbled in dark corners, *things* moving that ought not to. I'm ready to cause trouble. The thought of mixing horror and sword and sorcery has been appealing for a long time, and so this year I'm sitting down and trying to see what will work in a medieval setting and what won't.

The Elements of Horror

Exactly what constitutes horror? In the book store and the theater, horror has

managed to carve out a niche, and a lot of people have started to think of horror as a genre unto itself. But is horror really an element that can be applied to any genre? In many ways, the movie *Scarface* as well as the *Godfather* series had as many horror elements as straight "drama." At the same time, these movies did not



contain supernatural or magical elements. And yet they did a wonderful job of evoking

that primitive feeling we call horror. So why do they work?

The classic scene in *The Godfather* where the Hollywood director wakes up with a horse head in his bed, evoked three strong emotions:

- **Fear:** Someone managed to place the head in the director's bed without him noticing. The director now knows the mafia has the power and ability to kill him as easily and as quietly.
- **Revulsion:** The director sees the blood and knows it belongs to his prized (and loved) pet
- **Helplessness:** The director knows that he can do nothing to right the wrong.

The same emotions appear again in *Scarface* as the audience watches Al Pacino's character kill his best friend after he's married Pacino's sister:

- **Fear:** This brutal, insane man—nearly a force of nature—will not be stopped by any sense of common decency
- **Revulsion:** The knowledge that he would kill so close a friend
- **Helplessness:** The feeling that nothing can stop his primitive rages.

In measured doses, it's these three emotions that will scare the bejeezus out of your players. I say measured doses because if you overdo it, it becomes overly serious and pretentious; the events lose their punch. Too little, and players will most likely be

Interregnum #6

The Log That Files

I've always had a difficult time understanding TSR's antagonism towards competing companies and the gaming public in general. Why alienate the people who can help your company make more money? Why foster a vision of Big Brother when open-mindedness keeps the customer loyal? I understand that a certain amount of business sense is necessary when you're the biggest game shop on the block, but this latest stuff sounds outlandish, even for TSR. Would that they protected their few creative ideas as well as they do their copyrights. ☉ The Steve Jackson/White Wolf spat might be something TSR would point to as an example of how not to conduct business. Once you start down the path of collaboration, it's pretty much common sense to get things in very specific writing. I sympathize with Steve Jackson, but I also think he should have been smarter up front. That doesn't excuse White Wolf, though. What was I saying about maturity...? ☉ I liked your ad for Wonder. I know how exciting it is to start up a new game since I'm going through the same thing myself right now. Re: getting a good group of players. I've found that if I'm good friends with my players, we tend to have better gaming sessions as well. Maybe everyone should go out for a pizza before you actually start playing! :)

Session Notes

I wonder if designing a truly alien culture has more to do with juxtaposing familiar behaviors in an unfamiliar way than trying to come up with something "unique." Your assessment that it's impossible to create culture from "whole cloth" seems sound. ☉ Your *Falkenstein* review/trave :) was great! The idea of using a tarot deck instead of dice sounds interesting and more colorful than the traditional way of playing. I also like the question approach to designing character—a nice way of getting people to at least think about such things. ☉ I agree that forced character behavior is the opposite of what roleplaying is all about. I like the fact that *Pendragon* allows players to test personality characteristics on their own, and only when there is a question in the players' mind at what course to take.

asleep by the time you get around to the scary part. You can find the same elements in any number of "pure" horror movies—*The Exorcist*, *Carrie* and *The Omen* are some of the better ones. The key is to look for the events that cause the emotions, and realize that each of those events will hook your players if you cast them in a different light.

There must be a build up to these climactic scenes. Simply staging an unexpected killing is not nearly as frightening as having a sense that a killing *could* take place at any time. Foreshadowing—subtle hints at what's to come—goes a long way in putting players on the edge of their seats. Make them think something could come around the corner at any moment, and that they are vulnerable. Let nasty bits of bad luck crop up, like periodic gun jams, a sticky scabbard or creaky shoes. Then, allow those events resurface at the worst possible moment.

Isolation is another way to make parties feel vulnerable. I've played in games where the party never once lost control of the situation; after awhile the players began to feel as if they could part the Red Sea if they wanted to. Let them get lost for a change, or have the food supply go bad. Even better, make it seem as if there's something "out there" that's responsible for the events. Keep them off balance. Then when things are at their worst, have the enemy strike from hiding, never letting the characters see who's actually responsible for their misery. *He Knows You're Alone* was a fairly standard shlocky horror pic back in the seventies, but it's interesting to note that the entire movie was based on the premise that the bad guy couldn't be detected. Once evil

has a face, it can be dealt with. But up until that moment it can be lots of fun to keep the party guessing.

Once you've wound the tension up for all it's worth, then it's time to spring the bear trap. At this point, keep in mind two things: surprise and a sense of inevitability.

Interregnum #6 (cont.)

Refugee

Enjoyed the opening chapters of the novel. I wasn't sure what the actual title was—are you deciding between *No Tears for a Princess* and *The Warrior Unseen*? My vote is for the latter. The opening sequence is very good; I liked the remote style—it seemed to lend a more ominous quality to the events. Grandoon is a great name; I can picture what he looks like without a description. I'm intrigued by Elaine, though her impetuousness was a teeny bit over-the-top in places. Never been kissed? That gets me interested right there! :) Looking forward to more.

Who Is John Galt?

I went to RQCon 1; I wish I could be at RQCon 2. However, my car is holding me hostage these days, breaking down at the most inconvenient of times. I expect to throw several hundred more dollars down the automobile abyss before I get a chance to have such fun again. The live-action games sound great, too. (Sigh.) ☉ The Magic players will thank you, I'm sure. :)

For the horse head scene, the director starts the tension early on. We watch a scene where the mafia's agent has come to speak "reasonably" with the director. He is rudely rebuffed and told, in essence, to piss off. The mafia man reacts coolly to the situation, a bit of a surprise, since the audience knows how ruthless the mob can be. The two of them talk more extensively, and the director

shows the agent around his stables. Next we pan gently over the director's bed, and watch as he wakes up. Finally, the camera zooms in on the dripping blood and finally, the horse's head as the covers are lifted. Seeing the previous scenes showed us how dangerous the director's stance was. We were expecting some kind of retribution, and yet we didn't know what form that retribution would take. We were surprised, and yet looking back, it was completely obvious—inevitable.

Finally, remember that the GM can work all kinds of sinister events into the adventure, but the effects of these will amount to nothing unless the PCs have a personal stake in the outcome. Referees not only needs to know what gets to the PCs, but to the people who are playing them.

For a good discussion on using horror and suspense, take a gander at a book put out by Writer's Digest called *How to Write Tales of Horror, Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

Medieval Horror

A movie made in the 70's called *The Devils*, starring Vanessa Redgrave, got me thinking about using horror in a *Harn* campaign. The movie revolves around the atrocities committed in a small church-owned village

during the inquisition. Medieval brutality and religious insanity rule the day, and there are many innocent victims that fall in its wake. The story tells of the persecution of a priest and nun during a political bid to annex the church's land. The film was photographed in bleak autumn colors, and the final scene of people leaving the burning village to wander the corpse-strewn wasteland that is the countryside is as chilling as anything I've seen on screen.

But how does one incorporate the horror

element into a medieval/ fantasy campaign where monsters and magic can become so common that they lose their "scare" value? Well, there's plenty of horrifying things that went on in the dark ages. As in *The Devils*, religious and/or political inquisitions can leave whole villages burned-out graves.

Of course, in a fantasy setting, the demons can be all too real. But instead of using the typical horned demon, how about real possession? *The Exorcist* was pretty scary stuff, and possession can be used in unexpected moments to really throw the party for a loop. Cold, rainy weather can be used to good effect in any genre, but when you add the messiness of dirt roads and the chilly weight of chainmail, the backdrop becomes more striking than in a modern game. It's easy to make characters feel uncomfortable and vulnerable in a medieval



setting—things are always breaking or going bad: swords, wagon wheels, roofs, boots, trails, bridges, food. And, of course, the old standbys war, plague and famine are always fun to throw in as a gloomy backdrop, or better yet, to center stage.

The difficult part is in the details, though. How about black looks from strangers in an inn? Or a shadowy figure who always slips away before being captured? A weeping statue? A bloody hand, still twitching after the battle? A line of crucifixions? Criminals being impaled in the town square? Rats moving through the gutters, leaving behind something...living? Once you get started, there are gruesome possibilities everywhere.

Add a few details to the scenes. What if the party recognizes the ring on the twitching hand as the signet of the king? What if the PCs know one of the criminals being executed? What if the the weeping statue is of a benign deity, and the tears are blood?

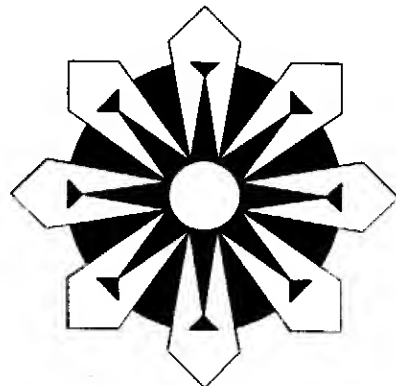
If you've ever seen one of those old paintings showing the rise of the dead or hell on earth during the black plague, you can see what frightened the medieval mind. Black magic, the evil eye, witches, the power of the devil. In fact the supernatural—the fear of the unknown—was a terrifying black abyss to the average peasant, and today's Halloween is but a mild tribute to that terrifying period. Black cats, old crones, and long shadows are just a few things that cause the average peasant's mind to reel.

So, by all means, send your PCs places they've never been before, and make sure

they don't trust anyone except their neighboring villagers (who may or may not be alive at the campaign's advent). Oh, yes. Avoid the temptation to give the characters a complete suit of armor, tons of magic and a small armory. Instead, dress them in rags, give them a hoe, and boot them out the door in the pouring rain. Much more exciting that way.

Harn is ideal for this sort of thing. The world is bleak and grimy, and only now is it striving to lift itself out of the muck. There is still a big question as to whether or not it will succeed; there are plenty of those who prefer the power and pleasures of the darkness. The good guys aren't exactly gaining ground, and there's more than enough evil to keep them occupied. There's also a sense of mystery; the average peasant doesn't know much about what lies beyond the next couple villages—most prefer it that way. If they did know what was going on, they might head for the hills. But then again, that's not such a great idea either... :0

By the way, I'm recruiting players, so if anyone in the Boston area is interested in challenging, scary, and most of all, fun, roleplaying, e-mail me or give me a call. :)



Interregnum #6 (cont.)

Tales from the Electric Underground

A nice smorgasbord of gaming stuff this month. The Instant Disaster Pills were a lot of fun, and I liked the background for the Thunderhammer. It might be interesting to design a scenario around one of the non-operational models. ● I'd be interesting in hearing your comments on Dark Empire (the comic series and later an addition to the RPG). A friend's roommate was one of the principal writers for the roleplaying supplement, and is still working for West End. ● The new books are pretty fun; I've read the first two, but haven't picked up *The Last Command* yet. Have you noticed that the newer adventures never have the main characters getting in as deep trouble as they did in the movies? :)

The Eight Track Mind

Enjoyed your thoughts on humor. Your plight in the as a Rune Lord was amusing—did you agree with the GM's sense of humor at the time? :) ● "Things You'll (Probably) Never See Sold" was hilarious. It might be fun to play a disgruntled ex-SJG employee in GURPS Austin. Hmm, the possibilities... :) ● You mean they haven't made Magic: the Orgy yet? I was sure I saw that the other day...or maybe that was the singing telegram place... :) ● I have played C.P.A.: the Accounting, though; only it was disguised as a regular roleplaying game. ● Nice to read your overview of the dark RPGs out there; it's nice to know what's available. Your approach to the whole thing seems sensible. ● I may have to pick up an issue of *The World Builder*. I always enjoyed the cultural articles in *Different Worlds* and have yet to find anything comparable.

Firestarter

Interesting thoughts on playing a team. The different roles seem to apply fairly well, although the dynamics of a group will generally be a big question mark until people have grown accustomed to one another. It would be interesting to dissect a couple of my old groups and see what roles people took on. ● The Rebel is the one that's always been tricky; you're right in saying that "rebels should not always be considered a bad thing," but it's pretty tough when the individual is disrupting a session because he's decided to go off on his own and

undermine everything else the party is doing. I admire any GM who knows of a mature (and fun) way of handling the situation without getting ticked off. :)

Reading Companion

I'm having a good time following your campaign; there's much of interest in the "hum-drum" life of an Orlanthi. :) I especially liked Nath Brawl's gift to Una. ● Your side notes are illuminating (sorry)—of much use to the person who's never played in Glorantha, and a nice way of showing off the system. Are your players experienced RuneQuesters? ● How are you making your maps?

The Skeleton Key

Glad to see an even-handed approach to all this serious/funny stuff. Having some humor makes the scary parts scarier, and the humor is more of a relief (and a lot more fun) after surviving a stroll through Mordor. Having heard of Avalon first-hand, I was happy to see your write-up in IR. The idea of a grilling a hedgehog for information sounds ridiculous on the surface, but after reading *Watership Down*, not so far-fetched after all. ● Elizabeth's thoughts on playing an amnesiac were interesting. It brought back memories of a limited series comic called *Somerset Holmes*. In issue one, we have the character waking up with (of course) no recollection of her past. It doesn't take long before people are chasing her. I agree that I would play an amnesiac if I was having a hard time grasping the setting and/or I was having trouble devising a character background. It takes a great deal of discretion, and the GM should warn the player of the consequences of taking this path to character creation. ● Character quotes were even better than usual this month! Who designs those Champions templates anyway?



Welcome ye landlubbers! Ye be in for special treat about Babbages' infernal machine that aye be usin' to waste me time and doubloons on.

The Scuttle

This area will be used to review great and crappy games, be they board, computer or role-playing (tabletop, live or otherwise). All the computer games reviewed here were run on a 386DX-40MHz, co-processor, 8 meg RAM, MS DOS 6.0, Windows 3.1, and a Pro Sonic 16 sound card (100% compatible with Adlib and Soundblaster cards) system.

All games are based on the Jolly Roger Scale (1-10 1 being poorest piece-o-krud ever seen and 10 being great keg-o-fun).

System Shock™

Kill all the monsters and save humanity by: Looking Glass Technologies

Distributed by: Origin(r)
requirements: 486DX/33, 4 megs RAM, 35 megs hard drive, mouse
Supports: Joystick(s)
Jolly Roger Rating-9.0

A very fine game from Looking Glass. It's sort of an advanced Doom™ in it's look

and feel but it is a very different game as it has a plot and a bit of a story to go with it. I don't rate it quite as high as Doom™ as it's playability isn't as high, don't get me wrong-you'll get hours of fun out this game, just not as much as Doom™. Its graphics are probably more advanced than any other games out there as it uses a real 3-D world whereas Doom is really on one level, it's just pushed up or down a bit like taking a plastic grid and putting an

orange under it. It's all on one level it's just stretched up and down a bit but if your gun is lined up regardless if a creatures up in the ceiling or in a pit you hit but this is not true for Shock. Shock is a bit amusing in that you can look up and down and have fullscreen smooth scrolling graphics but I'm finding the endgame a bit tough. Luckily it also has several features so you can turn the parts of game you like up and other parts down or even off. They



Another poor lad about to be harpooned.

are divided into Combat, Mission, Puzzle and Cyberspace. The cyberspace reminds me of an old computer game that I loved called The Magic Lamp and it totally ruled. All in all it kicks ass and isn't just nonstop killing; you can play it and enjoy it even when you aren't in a bad mood.

ye be on page 2 swab**DARK LEGIONS™****(CD-ROM version)****A friendly kill-your-neighbor game****by: Silicon Knights™****Distributed by: SSI™****System Requirements: 386 33mhz, VGA and 4 MB of RAM, usual Soundblaster or clone cards, mouse, and supports 2 joystick cards.****Jolly Roger Rating-8****Archon™ has really returned (yeah!).****This is the first version of Archon that finally captured the playability of its forefather.****Although it doesn't have any direct ties to Archon it definitely got the idea from there or the board game Titan™.****It is very entertaining as you have points to buy monsters, magic items and traps. You then set them up on a terrain board that has certain advantages/disadvantages for each monster. When they are both on the same space you pummel the crap out of each other (yeah!). The graphics on field are great but after about 15 minutes you'll be shifting to the overhead view to save on time (as it seems to take forever for some monsters-notably****the fire elemental-to get from one place to another) once you have seen all the neato graphics. It has great sound and modem support. I don't know why I get psyched about modem support but it always catches my interest but for all the games I own that have it (and most of my friends have computers that can handle it) it's just something that is never really used. I guess I'm planning to move to Siberia and it will be my only link to humanity :D. Tis a good game but if you don't like Archon™ or Titan™ you won't like this one.**

**This be me ol' first mate.
He was unfortunately a
bit too much like me and I
had to rip out his gizzard
when all the booty was
found in his cabin.**

(yucka!).**Corel Art Show 4 (CD-ROM)****CD of 3,000+ Graphics****Jolly Roger Rating-3.5****It sounds impressive, a 1,000,000 dollar (that's even a lot in Canadian money) contest for the best graphic designs in the world. The back cover even said the images are editable so you think you will be able to use them for clip art. Wrong! They give you permission to use it to make personal and intraoffice memos but if you really want to use it forget it. The images are only editable if you own Corel Draw™, a \$300+ program, and as they are in a proprietary format I couldn't seem to find a****conversion file for .crd to anything remotely useful.****The graphics are quite frankly not that impressive and some of them downright suck. How in the world did people expect to win anything with all this crap. A lot of it was obviously developed by advertisers for other companies as it is a graphic of their corporate logo or a dissection of an aircraft showing seating and all sorts of other fun stuff. Bottom line is don't bother with this one****Doom II™****Kill everything and save the world****by: ID Software Inc.****Distributed by GT Interactive Software****System Requirements: 386/33DX (486 and better recommended), 20MB on a hard drive, 4MB RAM, Support the usual SB cards.****Jolly Roger Rating:9.0**

Another fine game that surpasses the original. It's pretty much the same engine as the original with new monsters, sounds and some very intricate puzzles. And if you loved Commander Keen™ and Castle Wolfenstein™ you will be pleasantly surprised as they make a cameo appearance on one of the levels (I'm still laughing at what they did to Keen). All in all a great game and mucho better puzzles. I know I'm getting shallow or something in my old age but I wish they could have talked Sandy Peterson into designing a neat interactive plot to go along with all the mindless violence. It's nice to have a break from the violence every now and then and the way Sandy can build horror would even improve on it.

****SPOILERS****



Weird Magic Ideas

Damn! I came up with what I thought would be a great tournament deck but it got blown out of the water. I called the deck "The Master" as it's surprise is the Presence of the Master card. It's a neat card as most people rely a bit more on enchantments then they might realize and to make about %15+ of your opponents cards useless (from my experience guessing on the average) is just loads of fun (I hate Control Magics when I'm not using them). Just don't play a fireball christmas deck with mass land destruction (Tsunami and

Flashfire) again and again (the judges kept pitting me against the same deck) as it's one of the few decks that can tear it apart consistently and in the immortal words of Beavis and Butthead "That sucks!"

Davey Jones' Locker

or Comments to Interregnum #6



What I usually end up
feedin' in the doomed
game.

Peter Maranci: I must say that I found the article by Steve Jackson very interesting. I always knew that certain people are bastards. Thanks bunches for going the extra mile to get permission and trying to get the other side. I would like to run the Stormbull scenario sometime when I got 15 minutes to kill :)

Douglas Jorenby: I think that if the GM ran the aliens properly it should make someone like Capt. Kirk want to kill it.

George Phillies: Glad to see you are starting

another story. When I try to write fiction I have a very hard time filling more than a page (e.g.- The man in green kicks their ass, the end :).

Gilbert Pili: You should see some of the religious pamphlets against roleplaying. They're very humorous and don't really indicate why roleplaying is evil, they just are because it's something that somebody liked to do and that's a sin. I'll see if I can find some of them when I go home for Christmas.

Curtis Taylor: Thanks for the info on the RuneQuest Con 2. I had a lot of fun at the first one but I got so sick of the stupid net discussions that I burned out. I'll have to see if I can reignite my interest again. I wish they would stick in some stupid moderator so the real moronic details that are virtually useless in a real game would get punted or the discussion shortened. Some people seem to have the wind to drag very boring topics out for weeks. Praise the Red Goddess for the magic of unsubscribe!

Dale Meier:

Yeah! I'm glad to see stuff for more gaming systems like the Toon pills, BattleTech, and stuff for the Star Wars games. Keep up the good work.

Virgil Greene: Hmmmm.... Do you think it's a strange coincidence that Pete chose a picture of a skeletal hand holding a bottle of poison for your section about *Magic*?

Collie Collier: I like to play the bootlicking groveler for a different role. The hero/soldier thing does get to me every now and then so I like to play a character that has no pride, honor or spine. A minor drawback is that

monsters usually kill my characters out of disgust.

David Dunham: I really liked the improvement you made with the side notes (helps mucho and might lure more people into RQ). Well done!

David Hoberman:
Damn funny!
Puff sounds like a great PC.

Elizabeth McCoy:
Closet full of Breeding Coathangers? That would make a neat Call of Cthulhu campaign. Amnesia is great fun as long as the GM remembers :)



Colophon

Aye, Matey was created on Ami Pro v. 3.01. Most of the graphics are provided via a cheap hand held Logitech scanner and most of the pictures are from various Dover books (also known as copyright free).

THE EIGHT TRACK MIND #VII

Ramblings on RPGs, SF, and Misc.

Virgil S. Greene
klyfix@ace.com

It's October, the time when a young man's fancy turns to thoughts of skeletons and vampires and others of the undead. Thus we have this month's official topic: Horror. Well, I'm going to semi-follow the theme and so I'm going to write about...

VAMPIRES: THE VARIETIES

Ever wonder just where vampires came from? In a lot of the movies and books on the subject they are just sort of...there. While an individual vampire might well have a story of his or her origin we don't really have much of an indication where the whole "race" of vampires came from. I figure that it depends on just what vampires really are. I've come up with several types with varying origins though it should be kept in mind that a vampire may well fit into more than one category and there may even be more than one type of vampire in a given setting.

1. *The Insane*

There have been real people who were quite convinced that they were vampires. They'd drink blood and only go out at night and all that. One of the suggested explanations for the occasional accounts of vampires in history involves the fact that in the past (and occasionally even now) people would be buried when they "were not quite dead yet", to borrow from Monty Python. They would be seemingly dead, perhaps in a cataleptic state or other condition, and would revive in the grave. When they've dug themselves out they would be in some degree of shock and if their culture had stories of vampires they'd jump to the conclusion that they had joined the ranks of the undead. And some folk didn't even need to go through all that to believe that they were vampires; Jung suggested that the vampire is a universal archetype that some people would identify with.

For game purposes the insane "vampire" could be the source of apparent vampire murders or assaults. In a fantasy game where it is "known" that vampires exist it could really confuse adventurers who see signs of a vampire but don't detect the presence of undead creatures by magical investigation.

Weird variant idea. How about an insane vampire who doesn't realize his true nature? A vampire with a split personality perhaps who appears to be just a human who dislikes sunlight but otherwise seems normal, but who occasionally switches to another personality that manifests when they need to feed on blood? Could be a nasty trick to play on somebody in a GURPS campaign that takes the split personality disadvantage.

2. *The Cultists*

Blood. Mystic stuff. "The blood is the life" it says in the Bible. People who seek mystic powers or who wish to contact certain supernatural entities may feel that the sacrifice of blood or the consumption of blood will give them powers. There are people in America who do this, some say.

It would be possible in some game settings for blood cultists to actually become vampires; in *RuneQuest's* Glorantha setting there is a cult of Vivamort, a chaos deity whose Rune Lords are vampires. Or some cults could worship vampires. Most blood cults would likely just use blood in mystic rituals of some kind, however.

In most campaigns, a blood cult would be some evil group seeking to perform unholy magics for foul purposes; no better than real vampires and possibly regarded as vampires. But they may well not be evil; they may never kill, but just use small amounts of blood in certain spells. Would player characters be able to understand the difference between a vampire cult and a cult using blood in fertility rituals?

3. *The Cursed*

One of the little known ways for a person to become a vampire is to live an evil life or commit a particularly evil act. Witches, suicides, and others supposedly might become vampires upon their death. In *White Wolf's Vampire: the Masquerade* the first vampire, Caine, becomes a vampire as a punishment for some sin.

I have some problems with this. Let's see, you've committed a horrible wrong and are an evil person. For your punishment, you will be immortal and very hard to kill...huh? Even if they have to kill people to survive, that may very well not bother a truly evil person. But it could

be that an eternity of not being able to live a full and normal life might be a punishment to some.

But there's another sort of curse. Not on an evil person for his sins, but on a more or less righteous person cast by a malevolent person or entity. Such a person, forced to give up their old life and potentially kill to survive, will be in some degree of torment. An example would be Barnabas Collins on the old horror soap opera *Dark Shadows*. When he rejected the advances of the evil Angeleque, she turned him into a vampire, forcing on him a "life" of misery. This could be an interesting option for a player character in a game that isn't primarily about vampires; but it would be a challenge for both player and GM as they deal with dark urges and hiding the truth from others. Improperly done you've just got a PC with super powers, however.

4. *The Seduced*

There's a certain amount of appeal to vampirism. "Sleep all day. Stay up all night. Live forever. It's fun being a vampire." as they said in the movie "Lost Boys". Vampires are often perceived as sexy, and their feeding often has a sort of sexual connection. Plus vampires often have certain extra abilities; they're stronger and tougher than mortals usually and often they have psychic or magical powers. They are the perfect seducers.

This being the case, many people would willingly become vampires. Even in our more or less real world there are many people who would jump at the opportunity to become a vampire, some even if it did involve killing others. But they may not be fully aware of what they are getting into; after all, any recruiter is going to present it in the most positive way possible.

Of course often a person becomes a vampire in order to be with a lover or in order to be better able to seek revenge. In the syndicated vampire cop show *Forever Knight*, Nick appears to have "come across" as a result of his relationship with Jeanette but didn't really quite know just what he was getting into. He just wanted to be with her, not to become a murdering blood drinker. There's a decided downside to embracing vampirism to achieve certain ends if one doesn't recognize the full truth of vampirism.

5. *The Victims*

In some views, those killed by a vampire are doomed to become vampires themselves. They have made no decision to do so, and they have committed no great evils; they were just in the wrong place at the wrong time and became victims of someone's blood lust.

In other views, you do not create vampires simply by killing someone. You must give them some of your own blood (or it's equivalent) or do some sort of action to make a mortal into a vampire. The "creator" or "sire" has some sort of purpose in creating a new vampire. This may just be a desire for a new companion, or a need for a servant, or an act of spite. Dracula in Stoker's original book appears to have wanted Nina Harker partly as a new companion and partly as revenge against her husband and Dr. Van Helsing.

Often the new vampire is under some degree of control by the "sire". This is nice for the master, but often a great negative for the servant. While some masters may be concerned for their "child's" well being and help them to adjust, some might well use them for cannon fodder or the lowest form of slave. One interesting game idea would be the conversion of a PC into a vampire (in a non-vampire centered game); difficult to do as the player fights to retain their control while the GM asserts the power of the master. It could be a significant quest as the PC strives to free themselves and regain their full independence or perhaps seeks to reverse their transformation.

6. *The Diseased*

Vampirism resembles a disease in some ways. It is usually perceived as being transmitted by a bite or consumption of infected blood (or its equivalent). Now just suppose it was in fact actually a disease, not a supernatural state at all. That's the case in Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*, in which the world is overrun with a plague of vampires after a major war kicks up huge amounts of dust containing the disease organisms. These are far from romantic vamps; they have very little in the way of intelligence and very little in the way of special abilities other than being hard to kill. It would be possible to have a less extreme version of a vampire disease that left some degree of intellect so that PCs would have an interesting challenge without having a whole world of mindless vampires to deal with.

Of course a disease model of vampirism doesn't necessarily eliminate a magical or supernatural element in vampirism. Note that in the case of Barnabas Collins there was a disease organism that was possibly treatable despite the magical curse that caused his condition. In FASA's *Shadowrun*, vampirism is caused by a magically mutated virus.

The major thing to keep in mind with a disease model for vampirism is that it may well be curable by scientific or medical means even if it has a magical origin. If vampirism is curable, we get the interesting situation

where the idea that "the only good vampire is a dead vampire" is unacceptable even if it was previously the accepted view. After all, we don't kill people just because they're sick. Also, a vampire may well not *want* to be cured; why give up power and immortality just so you can go out in the day and have a more acceptable diet?

7. *the Mutants And The Aliens*

Generally, it is assumed that vampires were once normal humans. But this is not necessarily the case. It is certainly possible for vampires to in fact be a subspecies of humans, another species in the genus *homo*, another mammalian species that only looks human, or even a totally alien species. There have been a few stories in that line. George R.R. Martin postulated a subspecies of long lived regenerating vampires in his novel *Fevre Dream*. And in the famed British SFTV series *Dr. Who* there were two stories featuring vampires. In the story "State of Decay", the Doctor has to deal with a planet ruled by vampires created from humans by the Great Vampire whose race was mostly destroyed by the Time Lords. And in "The Curse of Fenric" the evil Fenric brings haemovores, blood drinking creatures evolved from humans in the far future to a secret British base during the latter part of WWII. In both stories normal humans can be converted into vampires by the alien or mutant; in most settings mutant or alien vampirism will be non-transmittable.

The important thing to keep in mind if vampires are an altogether different species rather than altered humans is that a person killed by a vampire is (generally) going to remain dead. They aren't going to be able to make you into one, but they may lie and say that they can in order to seduce victims. A vampire species may also think in an entirely different way than humans do.

8. *The Created*

One more unusual notion is vampires who were created by either science or sorcery. In a magically active world some vampires may be the product of evil sorcerous attempts at immortality or reanimating the dead. In future technologically advanced societies it may be possible to create a vampire through genetic manipulation or maybe some sort of surgical alterations. These created vampires might not conform to the traditions of vampirism and their vampirism may not be contagious, particularly if they are non-magical in nature. Of course it could be possible to manufacture a "vampire germ", possibly as an unusual bio-weapon.

Varying Vamps For Fun And Profit

The variety of vampire in a given game will vary according to tech and magic levels and the overall significance of vampires in society. Player character vampires are not likely to be insane or just cultists. Disease vampires may well be like a plague that has to actively be fought lest they leave no living humans. Cultists or crazies might well appear to be vampires to player characters in a magical world, and real vampires might appear to be insane to characters in a modern setting. At the very least, vampires should be more than just "claw, claw, bite" monsters but beings with reason and motivations and a logic behind their existence.

REVIEW

Future Imperfect

Six issue subscription \$10
Future Imperfect c/o Saestar
258 Harvard St. Suite #159
Brookline, MA 02146

Future Imperfect is a new small press magazine focusing on "the exploration of ideas; particularly those having to do with science fiction and fact." It has some (very) short stories and articles on the future, mostly from a dark future perspective though not exclusively. One stand out article on cyberpunk gaming points out the absurdity of the incredibly over-armed PCs of some games and has useful hints on putting a little more of a realistic slant on the setting. They do solicit contributions, but your remuneration would consist of a complimentary issue which is pretty standard for fanzines.

Overall, it is fairly well written, though some of the very assertive positions of some writers may annoy those with strong opinions in opposite directions. I do not know how much of a distribution it has; I picked up my copy at Complete Strategist in Boston and it features an advertisement from them so it may be distributed in the whole chain. In much of the country it may only be available by subscription.

BITS AND PIECES OF THIS AND THAT

Shadis And The Great Card Deal

A few months ago, the nice people at Wizards of the Coast had a nifty idea. They would give away special cards in various magazines, different cards in each magazine. The folk at Shadis magazine pushed this in a subscription promotion and promised that subscribers would be assured of receiving this special issue.

Naturally, they had had a tremendous response with 120,000 advance orders for the special issue.

But...Wizards of the Coast decided to modify the card promotion, giving two cards from a future expansion with one card that would be in all the magazines and another different card in each magazine instead of unique cards in each magazine. And this would be at a later date. This left *Shadis* in the position of having promised thousands of people something they couldn't deliver.

Now, they could have simply explained the situation to everyone, and offered them refunds if they desired. But they went beyond that. They purchased 15,000 M:tG *Legends* booster packs (so THAT'S where they all went :)) and packaged a random card with each issue with a few issues containing *Antiquities* cards and one hundred cards signed by the card's artist. In the process, they acquired the means to produce the inserts themselves. So in issue #16 they will have a random *Dark* card in each issue and they'll have other cards including samples from other collectable card games in the future. I think that's pretty cool.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, **The New Season.**

(SPOILERS for the season opener)

We went into the new season of DS9 with promises of changes. A new ship stationed at DS9, the *Defiant*, a true warship and the toughest ship in Star Fleet to hold off the Dominion. Sisco would get out of the station more. And we'd find out Odo's origins. With the departure of *Star Trek: the Next Generation* for the big screen and several months until *Star Trek: Lost in Space*...uhhhmmm...*Star Trek: Voyager* DS9 has to hold the Trek flame forth.

Well, in the two part season opener we got to see the *Defiant*, a rather ugly ship. We once again hear (from Major Kira) the old notion that "Star Fleet doesn't believe in warships" (just in research vessels that can level planets, apparently) but were informed that the *Defiant* was designed to fight the Borg but was mothballed when the Borg threat receded and some problems occurred with it. However, for such a kick-behind ship it really didn't do all that well against the Jem'Hadar, the Dominion's warriors, when Sisco led a mission to find the Founders who rule the Dominion. Well...it did blow up one of the little Jem'Hadar ships but the *Defiant* got captured. And for all that it had a Romulan cloaking device (operated by a Romulan officer.

why not a Klingon device? Aren't the Roms the enemy and the Klingons allies?) it didn't take long for the Jem'Hadar to learn to detect it.

Meanwhile, Odo and Kira escaped from the *Defiant* to the world of the shapeshifters. We learned the Odo isn't unique, but is part of a race of beings that once traveled the galaxy but were persecuted by the "solids" (their term for non-shapeshifters) due to their fear of the capabilities of "changelings".

The next we see of Sisco and the others is when Sisco's escape shuttle is found and returned to the station. Sisco finds out that Dax and O'Brien (who were captured earlier) managed to convince the Founders that the Federation is peaceful and that a deal can be made. But what a deal the Feds make with the Dominion! The Romulans are excluded from the talks the Dominion has with all the other Alpha Quadrant powers, despite the potential for a war. The Dominion gets Bajor's sector (without the approval of the Bajorans), DS9, and the wormhole. The Dominion gets to do pretty much as they want, actually. Sisco, Dax, Bashir, and the Cardassian tailor (spy) Garreck (note that the Cardassians approve of the agreement) decide that the Dominion is pretty much taking over the Federation and determine that the only thing that can be done about it is to collapse the wormhole (never mind about those creatures living in it) so that the Dominion can't reinforce their position. Garreck is shot while they're getting to a runabout that they will use to fire photon torpedoes into the wormhole to collapse it, but the effort is successful.

Now for the fun part. Kira detects an underground facility with their escape shuttle's sensors on the shapeshifter's world that interferes with communications. It has a door. Shapeshifters have little use or need for doors. Kira convinces Odo that this is somehow suspicious and he manages to get the door open. And then.....

We see Sisco and the others connected to some sort of machinery operated by a person who we thought was one of the Founders negotiating with the Federations. It turns out that the Shapeshifters are really the Founders who started the Dominion in an effort to bring order to the Galaxy, and all the scenes back on DS9 were a sort of induced dream.

Odo is appalled by this and is unconvinced of the need for their imperialistic tyranny. Since the Shapeshifters have a supreme rule that no Shapeshifter may harm another Shapeshifter, he is able to convince the Founders to let them all return to DS9, and returns with the rest of the crew as he can't approve of the Dominion's tyranny.

Here's the weird thing. Though two-parter in Trek tend to have great first halves and lousy second halves, I liked the ending much more than the first part; even though they had a major portion of the story turn out to be the equivalent of a dream. I was actually surprised when the "changelings" turned out to be the Founders. And the illusory sequence with Sisco rejecting the treaty and fighting against it was really pretty good. To be sure, I have to wonder about the Federation's survival chances. Consider that in two alternate realities the Federation was losing or lost wars with the Klingons, didn't really defeat the Borg but lucked out, and lost a Galaxy class starship to the Jem'Hadar. They don't seem to win wars, really. But I think the current Trek writers and producers may realize the problems and are working to make things a bit more realistic.

I should note that pretty much every one of my Loyal Associates hated this episode. And they're not all that fond of DS9. Hmmm, I suspect that some folk would prefer killing off everybody but Quark and have a new show; *Ferengi Trek*. :)

H.P. LOVECRAFT'S BOOK OF HORROR

Look for this book! You should be able to find it on the discount tables at your local B. Dalton store or possibly other stores owned by the Barnes and Noble company, as it is published by Barnes and Noble. It has Lovecraft's classic essay, "Supernatural Horror in Literature" which gives a nice overview of "weird fiction" up to the twenties and also gives an insight into the influences on Lovecraft's fiction. There's also several stories mentioned in the essay in the volume, though it isn't quite like what the cover blurb says, "21 classics of the literature chosen by the Master of Horror himself". That makes it sound like Lovecraft was the editor when in fact they just picked a selection of works that he mentioned particularly favorably. Anyway, it'll cost you about \$6 and should be worth it. Oh, and this isn't in the review section 'cause I haven't read the whole thing, yet; I have read some of the stories before though and the essay is quoted in almost any discussion of Lovecraft.

Strange Games

Would you believe a roleplaying game called *Rapture, The Second Coming*? It's billed as a "Roleplaying game of Theological Terror". This is from a company called Quintessential Mercy Studio. This is a weird idea; I assume that the setting is the Great Tribulation after the Rapture after the Righteous are taken into Heaven and the world suffers for around seven years while the Anti-Christ rules. Sort of what GURPS

Book of Revelations would be like. I've only seen an advertisement so I'm guessing from that.

Okay, how about a collectable card game called *Power Lunch*? Would you believe a game about lunches with celebrities and political figures and stuff? This is from Mayfair Games, and should be out eventually.

LOOKING BACKWARD

Somehow when I talked in last issue about the time in a campaign when my Lunar Rune Lord had a joke played on him I ended up saying that the King was "offending my armor" instead of "offending my honor". Whoops. Also, it should be noted that in most cases if you challenge a King to a duel you will end up fighting the King's Champion who is likely to be really tough as opposed to fighting the King.

COMMENTS ON IR #6

* THE LOG THAT FLIES:
Peter Maranci, our exalted editor

On SJG vs. WW: Well, the two companies appear to be on good enough speaking terms that GURPS Mage is going to be coming out eventually, if late. Interestingly, White Wolf is publishing some Elric works by Michael Moorcock and an anthology of Elric stories by various writers and may be doing some supplements for Chaosium's Elric! RPG. This from an interview with Moorcock in B. Dalton's *Sense of Wonder* free newsletter. Moorcock seemed to think that White Wolf should have no problems getting along with people. :)

* SESSION NOTES #20:
Douglas E. Jorenby

Castle Falkenstein does look interesting and different. I might look at it though I've got a few games not yet out that are a bit higher on my "purchase when I have money" list.

* REFUGEE #-54: George Phillies

Entertaining story! Could be published, maybe. Hmmm, I recall an editorial by *Fantasy and Science Fiction* editor Kristine Kathryn Rusch in which she noted that she was short on SF but flooded with "elfsy welfsy" fantasy. She noted a desire for fantasy that wasn't that sort of beaten to death story. Hmmm, maybe I should have said published and paid for?

* STRANGE SANDS: Gilbert Pili

On Humor and Paranoia: I agree that frankly a Paranoia game would be a lot more fun if it didn't consist

entirely of trying to avoid misstatements that might get you killed. The scenarios are really quite funny but I've never actually been in one; the game I played we never made it out of the briefing because it was a one session thing and we were too busy killing off the "traitors".

On the story: Well, it was pretty decent. Perhaps a bit overly short.

* WHO IS JOHN GALT? #6: Curtis Taylor

Someday, I'll go to an RQ con. Right after the new version of RQ comes out.:)

* TALES FROM THE ELECTRONIC UNDERGROUND #2, Vol. 1 : Dale Meier

On the Toon and Battletech Stuff: Looked interesting, particularly the Toon goodies.

On the comics reviews: From what I've seen in British computer magazines years back (I have various Sinclair variant computers) Judge Dredd is inherently really violent. There's going to be a movie starring Sylvester Stallone, for what it's worth.

On "Another Letter Jesus Might Write": Hmmm, some of the scripture quotes you use to promote the notion of diversity were used back during my childhood around Fundamentalist Pentecostals to encourage extremely restrictive "standards" of behavior.

* FIRESTORM #3: Collie Collier

On team play: While your examples imply that you're primarily viewing this in terms of supers type games, it strikes me that it is all real valid in other genres. In games I've played, leadership generally doesn't get determined. I've recall that occasionally a person with a strong, aggressive personality sort of seizes the mantle of leadership and the others may or may not follow. At other times I've just been frustrated with the rest of the party endlessly debating what to do with no answer and have just headed off in a direction and hoped people would follow. Rarely do I see a leader chosen by the party, or a character show such leadership that people acknowledge them as leader.

* READING COMPANION #2: David Dunham

One of your characters has a sword that can destroy a ghost? Hmmm, that certainly is unusual. Good background stuff.

* THE SKELETON KEY #11: David Hoberman

Avalon sounds interesting, and vaguely familiar... Neat characters.

On Elisabeth McCoy's character, Kendra Murphy: Amnesia does seem to have real possibilities as a disad; it certainly requires a lot of trust in the GM though. Not just on honesty, more importantly in the GM's giving playable abilities. Really weird characters can make for some interesting gaming; hmmm, I wish I'd gotten more of a chance to play good old Chmee Smithson.

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